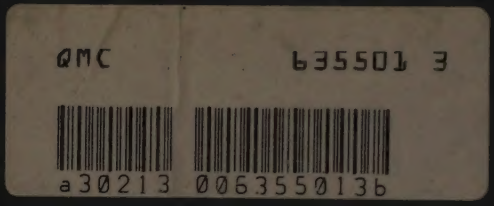

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THE FLOURISHING OF ROMANCE AND THE RISE OF ALLEGORY

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BY

GEORGE SAINTSBURY, M.A.

PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

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PREFACE.

As this volume, although not the first in chronological order, is likely to be the first to appear in the Series of which it forms part, and of which the author has the honour to be editor, it may be well to say a few words here as to the scheme of this Series generally. When that scheme was first sketched, it was necessarily objected that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain contributors who could boast intimate and equal knowledge of all the branches of European literature at any given time. To meet this by a simple denial was, of course, not to be thought of. Even universal linguists, though not unknown, are not very common; and universal linguists have not usually been good critics of any, much less of all, literature. But it could be answered that if the main principle of the scheme was sound—that is to say, if it

was really desirable not to supplant but to supplement the histories of separate literatures, such as now exist in great numbers, by something like a new "Hallam," which should take account of all the simultaneous and contemporary developments and their interaction —some sacrifice in point of specialist knowledge of individual literatures not only must be made, but might be made with little damage. And it could be further urged that this sacrifice might be reduced to a minimum by selecting in each case writers thoroughly acquainted with the literature which happened to be of greatest prominence in the special period, provided always that their general literary knowledge and critical habits were such as to render them capable of giving a fit account of the rest.

In the carrying out of such a scheme occasional deficiencies of specialist dealing, or even of specialist knowledge, must be held to be compensated by range of handling and width of view. And though it is in all such cases hopeless to appease what has been called "the rage of the specialist" himself—though a Mezzofanti doubled with a Sainte-Beuve could never, in any general history of European literature, hope to satisfy the special devotees of Roumansch or of Platt-Deutsch, not to mention those of the greater languages

—yet there may, I hope, be a sufficient public who, recognising the advantage of the end, will make a fair allowance for necessary shortcomings in the means.

As, however, it is quite certain that there will be some critics, if not some readers, who will not make this allowance, it seemed only just that the Editor should bear the brunt in this new Passage Perilous. I shall state very frankly the qualifications which I think I may advance in regard to this volume. I believe I have read most of the French and English literature proper of the period that is in print, and much, if not most, of the German. I know somewhat less of Icelandic and Provençal; less still of Spanish and Italian as regards this period, but something also of them: Welsh and Irish I know only in translations. Now it so happens that—for the period—French is, more than at any other time, the capital literature of Europe. Very much of the rest is directly translated from it; still more is imitated in form. All the great subjects, the great *matières*, are French in their early treatment, with the exception of the national work of Spain, Iceland, and in part Germany. All the forms, except those of the prose saga and its kinsman the German verse folk-epic, are found first in French.

Whosoever knows the French literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, knows not merely the best literature in form, and all but the best in matter, of the time, but that which all the time was imitating, or shortly about to imitate, both in form and matter.

Again, England presents during this time, though no great English work written "in the English tongue for English men," yet the spectacle, unique in history, of a language and literature undergoing a sea-change from which it was to emerge with incomparably greater beauty and strength than it had before, and in condition to vie with—some would say to outstrip —all actual or possible rivals. German, if not quite supreme in any way, gives an interesting and fairly representative example of a chapter of national literary history, less brilliant and original in performance than the French, less momentous and unique in promise than the English, but more normal than either, and furnishing in the epics, of which the *Nibelungenlied* and *Kudrun* are the chief examples, and in the best work of the Minnesingers, things not only of historical but of intrinsic value in all but the highest degree.

Provençal and Icelandic literature at this time are both of them of far greater intrinsic interest than English, if not than German, and they are infinitely

more original. But it so happens that the prominent qualities of form in the first, of matter and spirit in the second, though intense and delightful, are not very complicated, various, or wide-ranging. If monotony were not by association a question-begging word, it might be applied with much justice to both: and it is consequently not necessary to have read every Icelandic saga in the original, every Provençal lyric with a strictly philological competence, in order to appreciate the literary value of the contributions which these two charming isolations made to European history.

Yet again, the production of Spain during this time is of the smallest, containing, perhaps, nothing save the *Poem of the Cid*, which is at once certain in point of time and distinguished in point of merit; while that of Italy is not merely dependent to a great extent on Provençal, but can be better handled in connection with Dante, who falls to the province of the writer of the next volume. The Celtic tongues were either past or not come to their chief performance; and it so happens that, by the confession of the most ardent Celticists who speak as scholars, no Welsh or Irish *texts* affecting the capital question of the Arthurian legends can be certainly attributed to the twelfth or

early thirteenth centuries. It seemed to me, therefore, that I might, without presumption, undertake the volume. Of the execution as apart from the undertaking others must judge. I will only mention (to show that the book is not a mere compilation) that the chapter on the Arthurian Romances summarises, for the first time in print, the result of twenty years' independent study of the subject, and that the views on prosody given in chapter v. are not borrowed from any one.

I have dwelt on this less as a matter of personal explanation, which is generally superfluous to friends and never disarms foes, than in order to explain and illustrate the principle of the Series. All its volumes have been or will be allotted on the same principle—that of occasionally postponing or antedating detailed attention to the literary production of countries which were not at the moment of the first consequence, while giving greater prominence to those that were: but at the same time never losing sight of the *general* literary drift of the whole of Europe during the whole period in each case. It is to guard against such loss of sight that the plan of committing each period to a single writer, instead of strapping together bundles of independent essays by specialists, has been adopted. For

a survey of each time is what is aimed at, and a survey is not to be satisfactorily made but by one pair of eyes. As the individual study of different literatures deepens and widens, these surveys may be more and more difficult: they may have to be made more and more "by allowance." But they are also more and more useful, not to say more and more necessary, lest a deeper and wider ignorance should accompany the deeper and wider knowledge.

The dangers of this ignorance will hardly be denied, and it would be invidious to produce examples of them from writings of the present day. But there can be nothing ungenerous in referring—*honoris*, not *invidiæ causa*—to one of the very best literary histories of this or any century, Mr Ticknor's *Spanish Literature*. There was perhaps no man of his time who was more widely read, or who used his reading with a steadier industry and a better judgment, than Mr Ticknor. Yet the remarks on assonance, and on long monorhymed or single-assonanced tirades, in his note on Berceo (*History of Spanish Literature*, vol. i. p. 27), show almost entire ignorance of the whole prosody of the *chansons de geste*, which give such an indispensable light in reference to the subject, and which, even at the time of his first edition (1849), if not

quite so well known as they are to-day, existed in print in fair numbers, and had been repeatedly handled by scholars. It is against such mishaps as this that we are here doing our best to supply a guard.[1]

[1] One of the most difficult points to decide concerned the allowance of notes, bibliographical or other. It seemed, on the whole, better not to overload such a Series as this with them; but an attempt has been made to supply the reader, who desires to carry his studies further, with references to the best editions of the principal texts and the best monographs on the subjects of the different chapters. I have scarcely in these notes mentioned a single book that I have not myself used; but I have not mentioned a tithe of those that I have used.

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THE FLOURISHING OF ROMANCE

AND THE

RISE OF ALLEGORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE FUNCTION OF LATIN.

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THIS series is intended to survey and illustrate the development of the vernacular literatures of mediæval and modern Europe; and for that purpose it is unnecessary to busy ourselves with more than a part of the Latin writing which, in a steadily decreasing but—until the end of the last century—an always considerable proportion, served as the vehicle of literary expression.

Reasons for not noticing the bulk of mediæval Latin literature.

But with a part of it we are as necessarily concerned as we are necessarily compelled to decline the whole. For not only was Latin for centuries the universal means of communication between educated men of different languages, the medium through which such men received their education, the court-language, so to speak, of religion, and the vehicle of all the literature of knowledge which did not directly stoop to the comprehension of the unlearned; but it was indirectly as well as directly, unconsciously as well as consciously, a schoolmaster to bring the vernacular languages to literary accomplishment. They could not have helped imitating it, if they would; and they did not think of avoiding imitation of it, if they could. It modified, to a very large extent, their grammar; it influenced, to an extent almost impossible to overestimate, the prosody of their finished literature; it supplied their vocabulary; it furnished models for all their first conscious literary efforts of the more deliberate kind, and it conditioned those which were more or less spontaneous.

But, even if we had room, it would profit us little to busy ourselves with the Latin of diplomacy or the Latin of chronicles, with the Latin of such scientific treatises as were written or with the Latin of theology. All these except, for obvious reasons, the first, tended away from Latin into the vernaculars as time went on, and were but of lesser literary moment, even while they continued to be written in Latin. Nor in *belles lettres* proper were such serious performances as continued to be written well into our period of capital

importance. Such a book, for instance, as the well-known *Trojan War* of Joseph of Exeter,[1] though it really deserves much of the praise which it used to receive,[2] can never be anything much better than a large prize poem, such as those which still receive and sometimes deserve the medals and the gift-books of schools and universities. Every now and then a man of irrepressible literary talent, having no vernacular or no public in the vernacular ready to his hand, will write in Latin a book like the *De Nugis Curialium*,[3] which is good literature though bad Latin. But on the whole it is a fatal law of such things that the better the Latin the worse must the literature be.

Excepted divisions.

We may, however, with advantage select three divisions of the Latin literature of our section of the Middle Ages, which have in all cases no small literary importance and interest, and in some not a little literary achievement. And these are the comic and burlesque Latin writings, especially in verse; the Hymns; and the great body of philosophical writing which goes by the general title of Scholastic Philosophy, and which was at its palmiest time in the later portion of our own special period.

Comic Latin literature.

It may not be absolutely obvious, but it does not require much thought to discover, why the comic and burlesque Latin writing, especially in verse, of the earlier Middle Ages holds such a posi-

[1] Included with Dictys and Dares in a volume of Valpy's Delphin Classics.

[2] Cf. Warton, *History of English Poetry*. Ed. Hazlitt, i. 226-292.

[3] Gualteri Mapes, *De Nugis Curialium Distinctiones Quinque*. Ed. T. Wright: Camden Society, 1850.

tion. But if we compare such things as the *Carmina Burana*, or as the Goliardic poems attributed to or connected with Walter Map,[1] with the early *fabliaux*, we shall perceive that while the latter, excellently written as they sometimes are, depend for their comedy chiefly on matter and incident, not indulging much in play on words or subtle adjustment of phrase and cadence, the reverse is the case with the former. A language must have reached some considerable pitch of development, must have been used for a great length of time seriously, and on a large variety of serious subjects, before it is possible for anything short of supreme genius to use it well for comic purposes. Much indeed of this comic use turns on the existence and degradation of recognised serious writing. There was little or no opportunity for any such use or misuse in the infant vernaculars; there was abundant opportunity in literary Latin. Accordingly we find, and should expect to find, very early parodies of the offices and documents of the Church,—things not unnaturally shocking to piety, but not perhaps to be justly set down to any profane, much less to any specifically blasphemous, intention. When the quarrel arose between Reformers and "Papists," intentional ribaldry no doubt began. But such a thing as, for example, the "Missa de Potatoribus"[2] is much more significant of an unquestioning familiarity than of deliberate insult.

[1] *Carmina Burana*, Stuttgart, 1847; *Political Songs of England* (1839), and *Latin Poems attributed to Walter Mapes* (1841), both edited for the Camden Society by T. Wright.

[2] Wright and Halliwell's *Reliquiæ Antiquæ* (London, 1845), ii. 208.

It is an instance of the same bent of the human mind which has made very learned and conscientious lawyers burlesque law, and which induces schoolboys and undergraduates to parody the classics, not at all because they hate them, but because they are their most familiar literature.

At the same time this comic degradation, as may be seen in its earliest and perhaps its greatest practitioner Aristophanes—no bad citizen or innovating misbeliever—leads naturally to elaborate and ingenious exercises in style, to a thorough familiarity with the capacities of language, metre, rhyme. And expertness in all these things, acquired in the Latin, was certain sooner or later to be transferred to the vernacular. No one can read the Latin poems which cluster in Germany round the name of the "Arch-Poet,"[1] in England round that of Map, without seeing how much freer of hand is the Latin rhymer in comparison with him who finds it "hard only not to stumble" in the vernacular. We feel what a gusto there is in this graceless catachresis of solemn phrase and traditionally serious literature; we perceive how the language, colloquially familiar, taught from infancy in the schools, provided with plentiful literary examples, and having already received perfect licence of accommodation to vernacular rhythms and the poetical ornaments of the hour, puts its stammering rivals, fated though they were to oust it, out of court for the time by its audacious compound of experience and experiment.

[1] On this Arch-Poet see Scherer, *History of German Literature* (Engl. ed., Oxford, 1886), i. 68.

Examples of its verbal influence.

The first impression of any one who reads that exceedingly delightful volume the Camden Society's *Poems attributed to Walter Mapes* may be one of mere amusement, of which there are few books fuller. The agreeable effrontery with which the question "whether to kiss Rose or Agnes" is put side by side with that "whether it is better to eat flesh cooked in the cauldron or little fishes driven into the net;" the intense solemnity and sorrow for self with which Golias discourses in trochaic mono-rhymed *laisses* of irregular length, *De suo Infortunio;* the galloping dactylics of the "Apocalypse"; the concentrated scandal against a venerated sex of the *De Conjuge non Ducenda*, are jocund enough in themselves, if not invariably edifying. But the good-for-nothing who wrote

> "Fumus et mulier et stillicidia
> Expellunt hominem a domo propria,"

was not merely cracking jokes, he was exercising himself, or his countrymen, or at farthest his successors, in the use of the vernacular tongues with the same lightness and brightness. When he insinuated that

> "Dulcis erit mihi status
> Si prebenda muneratus,
> Reditu vel alio,
> Vivam, licet non habunde,
> Saltem mihi detur unde
> Studeam de proprio," —

he was showing how things could be put slyly, how the stiffness and awkwardness of native speech could be suppled and decorated, how the innuendo, the

turn of words, the *nuance*, could be imparted to dog-Latin. And if to dog-Latin, why not to genuine French, or English, or German?

And he was showing at the same time how to make verse flexible, how to suit rhythm to meaning, how to give freedom, elasticity, swing. No doubt this had in part been done by the great serious poetry to which we shall come presently, and which he and his kind often directly burlesqued. But in the very nature of things comic verse must supple language to a degree impossible, or very seldom possible, to serious poetry: and in any case the mere tricks with language which the parodist has to play, familiarise him with the use of it. Even in these days of multifarious writing, it is not absolutely uncommon to find men of education and not devoid of talent who confess that they have no notion how to put things, that they cannot express themselves. We can see this tying of the tongue, this inability to use words, far more reasonably prevalent in the infancy of the vernacular tongues; as, for instance, in the constant presence of what the French call *chevilles*, expletive phrases such as the "sikerly," and the "I will not lie," the "verament," and the "everidel," which brought a whole class of not undeserving work, the English verse romances of a later time, into discredit. Latin, with its wide range of already consecrated expressions, and with the practice in it which every scholar had, made recourse to constantly repeated stock phrases at least less necessary, if necessary at all; and the writer's set purpose to amuse made it incumbent on him not to be

The value of burlesque.

tedious. A good deal of this comic writing may be graceless: some of it may, to delicate tastes, be shocking or disgusting. But it was at any rate an obvious and excellent school of word-fence, a gymnasium and exercising-ground for style.

Hymns.

And if the beneficial effect in the literary sense of these light songs is not to be overlooked, how much greater in every way is that of the magnificent compositions of which they were in some cases the parody! It will be more convenient to postpone to a later chapter of this volume a consideration of the exact way in which Latin sacred poetry affected the prosody of the vernacular; but it is well here to point out that almost all the finest and most famous examples of the mediæval hymn, with perhaps the sole exception of *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, date from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[1] Ours are the stately rhythms of Adam of St Victor, and the softer ones of St Bernard the Greater. It was at this time that Jacopone da Todi, in the intervals of his eccentric vernacular exercises, was inspired to write the *Stabat Mater*. From this time comes that glorious descant of Bernard of Morlaix, in which, the more its famous and very elegant English

[1] A few more precise dates may be useful. St Bernard, 1091-1153; Bernard of Morlaix, exact years uncertain, but twelfth century; Adam of St Victor, *ob. cir.* 1190; Jacopone da Todi, *ob.* 1306; St Bonaventura, 1221-1274; Thomas of Celano, *fl. c.* 1226. The two great storehouses of Latin hymn-texts are the well-known books of Daniel, *Thesaurus Hymnologicus*, and Mone, *Hymni Latini Medii Ævi*. And on this, as on all matters connected with hymns, the exhaustive *Dictionary of Hymnology* (London, 1892) of the Rev. John Julian will be found most valuable.

paraphrase is read beside it, the more does the greatness and the beauty of the original appear. And from this time comes the greatest of all hymns, and one of the greatest of all poems, the *Dies Iræ*. There have been attempts—more than one of them—to make out that the *Dies Iræ* is no such wonderful thing after all: attempts which are, perhaps, the extreme examples of that cheap and despicable paradox which thinks to escape the charge of blind docility by the affectation of heterodox independence. The judgment of the greatest (and not always of the most pious) men of letters of modern times may confirm those who are uncomfortable without authority in a different opinion. Fortunately there is not likely ever to be lack of those who, authority or no authority, in youth and in age, after much reading or without much, in all time of their tribulation and in all time of their wealth, will hold these wonderful triplets, be they Thomas of Celano's or another's, as nearly or quite the most perfect wedding of sound to sense that they know.

The Dies Iræ.

It would be possible, indeed, to illustrate a complete dissertation on the methods of expression in serious poetry from the fifty-one lines of the *Dies Iræ*. Rhyme, alliteration, cadence, and adjustment of vowel and consonant values,—all these things receive perfect expression in it, or, at least, in the first thirteen stanzas, for the last four are a little inferior. It is quite astonishing to reflect upon the careful art or the felicitous accident of such a line as

"Tuba mirum spargens sonum,"

with the thud of the trochee [1] falling in each instance in a different vowel; and still more on the continuous sequence of five stanzas, from *Judex ergo* to *non sit cassus*, in which not a word could be displaced or replaced by another without loss. The climax of verbal harmony, corresponding to and expressing religious passion and religious awe, is reached in the last—

> "Quærens me sedisti lassus,
> Redemisti crucem passus:
> Tantus labor non sit cassus!"—

where the sudden change from the dominant *e* sounds (except in the rhyme foot) of the first two lines to the *a*'s of the last is simply miraculous, and miraculously assisted by what may be called the internal sub-rhyme of *sedisti* and *redemisti*. This latter effect can rarely be attempted without a jingle: there is no jingle here, only an ineffable melody. After the *Dies Iræ*, no poet could say that any effect of poetry was, as far as sound goes, unattainable, though few could have hoped to equal it, and perhaps no one except Dante and Shakespeare has fully done so.

Beside the grace and the grandeur, the passion and the art, of this wonderful composition, even the best remaining examples of mediæval hymn-writing may look a little pale. It is possible for criticism, which is not hypercriticism, to object to the pathos of the *Stabat*, that it is a trifle luscious, to find fault with the rhyme-scheme of *Jesu dulcis memoria*, that it is a little faint and frittered; while, of course, those who do not like

[1] Of course no one of the four is a pure classical trochee; but all obey the trochaic *rhythm*.

conceits and far-fetched interpretations can always quarrel with the substance of Adam of St Victor. But those who care for merits rather than for defects will never be weary of admiring the best of these hymns, or of noticing and, as far as possible, understanding their perfection. Although the language they use is old, and their subjects are those which very competent and not at all irreligious critics have denounced as unfavourable to poetry, the special poetical charm, as we conceive it in modern days, is not merely present in them, but is present in a manner of which few traces can be found in classical times. And some such students, at least, will probably go on to examine the details of the hymn-writers' method, with the result of finding more such things as have been pointed out above.

The rhythm of Bernard.

Let us, for instance, take the rhythm of Bernard the Englishman (as he was really, though called of Morlaix). "Jerusalem the Golden" has made some of its merits common property, while its practical discoverer, Archbishop Trench, has set those of the original forth with a judicious enthusiasm which cannot be bettered.[1] The point is, how these merits, these effects, are produced. The piece is a crucial one, because, grotesque as its arrangement would probably have seemed to an

[1] *Sacred Latin Poetry* (2d ed., London, 1864), p. 304. This admirable book has not been, and from its mixture of taste and learning is never likely to be, superseded as an introduction to, and chrestomathy of, the subject. Indeed, if a little touch of orthodox prudery had not made the Archbishop exclude the *Stabat*, hardly a hymn of the very first class could be said to be missing in it.

Augustan, its peculiarities are superadded to, not substituted for, the requirements of classical prosody. The writer does not avail himself of the new accentual quantification, and his other licences are but few. If we examine the poem, however, we shall find that, besides the abundant use of rhyme — interior as well as final—he avails himself of all those artifices of what may be called word-music, suggesting beauty by a running accompaniment of sound, which are the main secret of modern verse. He is not satisfied, ample as it may seem, with his double-rhyme harmony. He confines himself to it, indeed, in the famous overture-couplet—

> "Hora novissima, tempora pessima sunt, vigilemus!
> Ecce! minaciter imminet arbiter ille supremus."

But immediately afterwards, and more or less throughout, he redoubles and redoubles again every possible artifice—sound-repetition in the *imminet, imminet*, of the third line, alliteration in the *recta remuneret* of the fourth, and everywhere trills and *roulades*, not limited to the actually rhyming syllables of the same vowel—

> "Tunc nova gloria pectora sobria clarificabit . . .
> Candida lilia, viva monilia, sunt tibi Sponsa . . .
> Te peto, te colo, te flagro, te volo, canto, saluto."

He has instinctively discovered the necessity of varying as much as possible the cadence and composition of the last third of his verse, and carefully avoids anything like a monotonous use of his only spondee; in a batch of eighteen lines taken at random, there are only six end-words of two syllables, and these only

once rhyme together. The consequence of these and other devices is that the whole poem is accompanied by a sort of swirl and eddy of sound and cadence, constantly varying, constantly shifting its centres and systems, but always assisting the sense with grateful clash or murmur, according as it is loud or soft, of word-music.

Literary perfection of the Hymns.

The vernacular languages were not as yet in case to produce anything so complicated as this, and some of them have never been quite able to produce it to this day. But it must be obvious at once what a standard was held up before poets, almost every one of whom, even if he had but small Latin in a general way, heard these hymns constantly sung, and what means of producing like effects were suggested to them. The most varied and charming lyric of the Middle Ages, that of the German Minnesingers, shows the effect of this Latin practice side by side, or rather inextricably mingled, with the effects of the preciser French and Provençal verse-scheme, and the still looser but equally musical, though half-inarticulate, suggestions of indigenous song. That English prosody — the prosody of Shakespeare and Coleridge, of Shelley and Keats—owes its origin to a similar admixture the present writer at least has no doubt at all, while even those who deny this can hardly deny the positive literary achievement of the best mediæval hymns. They stand by themselves. Latin —which, despite its constant colloquial life, still even in the Middle Ages had in profane use many of the drawbacks of a dead language, being either slipshod or

stiff,—here, owing to the millennium and more during which it had been throughout Western Europe the living language and the sole living language of the Church Universal, shakes off at once all artificial and all doggerel character. It is thoroughly alive: it comes from the writers' hearts as easily as from their pens. They have in the fullest sense proved it; they know exactly what they can do, and in this particular sphere there is hardly anything that they cannot do.

Scholastic Philosophy.

The far-famed and almost more abused than famed Scholastic Philosophy[1] cannot be said to have added to positive literature any such masterpieces in prose as the hymn-writers (who were very commonly themselves Scholastics) produced in verse. With the exception of Abelard, whose interest is rather biographical than strictly literary, and perhaps Anselm, the heroes of mediæval dialectic, the Doctors Subtle and Invincible, Irrefragable and Angelic, have left nothing which even on the widest interpretation of pure literature can be included within it, nor even any names that figure in any but the least

[1] I should feel even more diffidence than I do feel in approaching this proverbially thorny subject if it were not that many years ago, before I was called off to other matters, I paid considerable attention to it. And I am informed by experts that though the later (chiefly German) Histories of Philosophy, by Ueberweg, Erdmann, Windelband, &c., may be consulted with advantage, and though some monographs may be added, there are still no better guides than Hauréau, *De la Philosophie Scolastique* (revised edition) and Prantl, *Geschichte der Logik im Abendlande*, who were our masters five-and-twenty years ago. The last-named book in especial may be recommended with absolute confidence to any one who experiences the famous desire for "something craggy to break his mind upon."

select of literary histories. Yet they cannot but receive some notice here in a history, however condensed, of the literature of the period of their chief flourishing. This is not because of their philosophical importance, although at last, after much bandying of not always well-informed argument, that importance is pretty generally allowed by the competent. It has, fortunately, ceased to be fashionable to regard the dispute about Universals as proper only to amuse childhood or beguile dotage, and the quarrels of Scotists and Thomists as mere reductions of barren logomachy to the flatly absurd. Still, this importance, though real, though great, is not directly literary. The claim which makes it impossible to pass them over here is that excellently put in the two passages from Condorcet and Hamilton which John Stuart Mill (not often a scholastically minded philosopher) set in the forefront of his *Logic*, that, in the Scottish philosopher's words, "it is to the schoolmen that the vulgar languages are indebted for what precision and analytical subtlety they possess;" and that, as the Frenchman, going still further, but hardly exaggerating, lays it down, "logic, ethics, and metaphysics itself owe to Scholasticism a precision unknown to the ancients themselves."

Its influence on phrase and method.

There can be no reasonable or well-informed denial of the fact of this: and the reason of it is not hard to understand. That constant usage, the effect of which has been noted in theological verse, had the same effect in philosophico-theological prose. Latin is before all things a precise lan-

guage, and the one qualification which it lacked in classical times for philosophic use, the presence of a full and exact terminology, was supplied in the Middle Ages by the fearless barbarism (as pedants call it) which made it possible and easy first to fashion such words as *aseitas* and *quodlibetalis*, and then, after, as it were, lodging a specification of their meaning, to use them ever afterwards as current coin. All the peculiarities which ignorance or sciolism used to ridicule or reproach in the Scholastics—their wiredrawnness, their lingering over special points of verbal wrangling, their neglect of plain fact in comparison with endless and unbridled dialectic—all these things did no harm but much positive good from the point of view which we are now taking. When a man defended theses against lynx-eyed opponents or expounded them before perhaps more lynx-eyed pupils, according to rules familiar to all, it was necessary for him, if he were to avoid certain and immediate discomfiture, to be precise in his terms and exact in his use of them. That it was possible to be childishly as well as barbarously scholastic nobody would deny, and the famous sarcasms of the *Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum*, two centuries after our time, had been anticipated long before by satirists. But even the logical fribble, even the logical jargonist, was bound to be exact. Now exactness was the very thing which languages, mostly young in actual age, and in all cases what we may call uneducated, unpractised in literary exercises, wanted most of all. And it was impossible that they should have better teachers in it than the few famous, and even than most of the numerous

unknown or almost unknown, philosophers of the Scholastic period.

The great Scholastics.

It has been said that of those most famous almost all belong specially to this our period. Before it there is, till its very latest eve, hardly one except John Scotus Erigena; after it none, except Occam, of the very greatest. But during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there is scarcely a decade without its illustration. The first champions of the great Realist and Nominalist controversy, Roscellinus and William of Champeaux, belong to the eleventh century in part, as does their still more famous follower, Abelard, by the first twenty years of his life, while almost the whole of that of Anselm may be claimed by it.[1] But it was not till the extreme end of that century that the great controversy in which these men were the front-fighters became active (the date of the Council of Soissons, which condemned the Nominalism of Roscellinus as tritheistic is 1092), and the controversy itself was at its hottest in the earlier part of the succeeding age. The Master of the Sentences, Peter Lombard, belongs wholly to the twelfth, and the book which gives him his scholastic title dates from its very middle. John of Salisbury,

[1] Some exacter dates may be useful. Anselm, 1033-1109; Roscellin, 1050?-1125; William of Champeaux, ?-1121; Abelard, 1079-1142; Peter Lombard, *ob.* 1164; John of Salisbury, ?-1180; Alexander of Hales, ?-1245; Vincent of Beauvais, ?-1265?; Bonaventura, 1221-1274; Albertus Magnus, 1195-1280; Thomas Aquinas, 1225?-1274; Duns Scotus, 1270?-1308?; William of Occam, ?-1347; Roger Bacon, 1214-1292; Petrus Hispanus, ?-1277; Raymond Lully, 1235-1315.

one of the clearest-headed as well as most scholarly of the whole body, died in 1180. The fuller knowledge of Aristotle, through the Arabian writers, coincided with the latter part of the twelfth century: and the curious outburst of Pantheism which connects itself on the one hand with the little-known teaching of Amaury de Bène and David of Dinant, on the other with the almost legendary "Eternal Gospel" of Joachim of Flora, occurred almost exactly at the junction of the twelfth and thirteenth. As for the writers of the thirteenth century itself, that great period holds in this as in other departments the position of palmiest time of the Middle Ages. To it belong Alexander Hales, who disputes with Aquinas the prize for the best example of the Summa Theologiæ; Bonaventura, the mystic; Roger Bacon, the natural philosopher; Vincent of Beauvais, the encyclopædist. If, of the four greatest of all, Albert of Bolstadt, Albertus Magnus, the "Dumb Ox of Cologne," was born seven years before its opening, his life lasted over four-fifths of it; that of Aquinas covered its second and third quarters; Occam himself, though his main exertions lie beyond us, was probably born before Aquinas died; while John Duns Scotus hardly outlived the century's close by a decade. Raymond Lully (one of the most characteristic figures of Scholasticism and of the mediæval period, with his "Great Art" of automatic philosophy), who died in 1315, was born as early as 1235. Peter the Spaniard, Pope and author of the *Summulæ Logicales*, the grammar of formal logic for ages, died in 1277.

Of the matter which these and others by hundreds put in forgotten wealth of exposition, no account will be expected here. Even yet it is comparatively unexplored, or else the results of the exploration exist only in books brilliant, but necessarily summary, like that of Hauréau, in books thorough, but almost as formidable as the original, like that of Prantl. Even the latest historians of philosophy complain that there is up to the present day no "ingoing" (as the Germans say) monograph about Scotus and none about Occam.[1] The whole works of the latter have never been collected at all: the twelve mighty volumes which represent the compositions of the former contain probably not the whole work of a man who died before he was forty. The greater part of the enormous mass of writing which was produced, from Scotus Erigena in the ninth century to Gabriel Biel in the fifteenth, is only accessible to persons with ample leisure and living close to large and ancient libraries. Except Erigena himself, Anselm in a few of his works, Abelard, and a part of Aquinas, hardly anything can be found in modern editions, and even the zealous efforts of the present Pope have been less effectual in divulging Aquinas than those of his predecessors were in making Amaury of Bena a mys-

[1] Rémusat on Anselm and Cousin on Abelard long ago smoothed the way as far as these two masters are concerned, and Dean Church on Anselm is also something of a classic. But I know no other recent monograph of any importance by an Englishman on Scholasticism except Mr R. L. Poole's *Erigena*. Indeed the "Erin-born" has not had the ill-luck of his country, for with the Migne edition accessible to everybody, he is in much better case than most of his followers two, three, and four centuries later.

tery.[1] Yet there has always, in generous souls who have some tincture of philosophy, subsisted a curious kind of sympathy and yearning over the work of these generations of mainly disinterested scholars who, whatever they were, were thorough, and whatever they could not do, could think. And there have even, in these latter days, been some graceless ones who have asked whether the Science of the nineteenth century, after an equal interval, will be of any more positive value—whether it will not have even less comparative interest than that which appertains to the Scholasticism of the thirteenth.

However this may be, the claim, modest and even meagre as it may seem to some, which has been here once more put forward for this Scholasticism—the claim of a far-reaching educative influence in mere language, in mere system of arrangement and expression, will remain valid. If, at the outset of the career of modern languages, men had thought with the looseness of modern thought, had indulged in the haphazard slovenliness of modern logic, had popularised theology and vulgarised rhetoric, as we have seen both popularised and vulgarised since, we should indeed have been in evil case. It used to be thought clever to moralise and to felicitate mankind over the rejection of the stays, the fetters, the prison in which its thought was mediævally kept. The justice or the injustice, the taste or the

[1] The Amalricans, as the followers of Amaury de Bène were termed, were not only condemned by the Lateran Council of 1215, but sharply persecuted; and we know nothing of the doctrines of Amaury, David, and the other northern Averroists or Pantheists, except from later and hostile notices.

vulgarity, of these moralisings, of these felicitations, may not concern us here. But in expression, as distinguished from thought, the value of the discipline to which these youthful languages were subjected is not likely now to be denied by any scholar who has paid attention to the subject. It would have been perhaps a pity if thought had not gone through other phases; it would certainly have been a pity if the tongues had all been subjected to the fullest influence of Latin constraint. But that the more lawless of them benefited by that constraint there can be no doubt whatever. The influence of form which the best Latin hymns of the Middle Ages exercised in poetry, the influence in vocabulary and in logical arrangement which Scholasticism exercised in prose, are beyond dispute: and even those who will not pardon literature, whatever its historical and educating importance be, for being something less than masterly in itself, will find it difficult to maintain the exclusion of the *Cur Deus Homo*, and impossible to refuse admission to the *Dies Iræ*.

CHAPTER II.

CHANSONS DE GESTE.[1]

EUROPEAN LITERATURE IN 1100—LATE DISCOVERY OF THE "CHANSONS"—THEIR AGE AND HISTORY—THEIR DISTINGUISHING CHARACTER—MISTAKES ABOUT THEM—THEIR ISOLATION AND ORIGIN—THEIR METRICAL FORM—THEIR SCHEME OF MATTER—THE CHARACTER OF CHARLEMAGNE—OTHER CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERISTICS—REALIST QUALITY—VOLUME AND AGE OF THE "CHANSONS"—TWELFTH CENTURY—THIRTEENTH CENTURY—FOURTEENTH, AND LATER—"CHANSONS" IN PRINT—LANGUAGE: "OC" AND "OÏL"—ITALIAN—DIFFUSION OF THE "CHANSONS"—THEIR AUTHORSHIP AND PUBLICATION—THEIR PERFORMANCE—HEARING, NOT READING, THE OBJECT—EFFECT ON PROSODY—THE "JONGLEURS"—"JONGLERESSES," ETC.—SINGULARITY OF THE "CHANSONS"—THEIR CHARM—PECULIARITY OF THE "GESTE" SYSTEM—INSTANCES—SUMMARY OF THE "GESTE" OF WILLIAM OF ORANGE—AND FIRST OF THE "COURONNEMENT LOYS"—COMMENTS ON THE "COURONNEMENT"—WILLIAM OF ORANGE—THE EARLIER POEMS OF THE CYCLE—THE "CHARROI DE NÎMES"—THE "PRISE D'ORANGE"—THE STORY OF VIVIEN—"ALISCANS"—THE END OF THE STORY—RENOUART—SOME OTHER "CHANSONS"—FINAL REMARKS ON THEM.

WHEN we turn from Latin and consider the condition of the vernacular tongues in the year 1100, there is

[1] I prefer, as more logical, the plural form *chansons de gestes*, and have so written it in my *Short History of French Literature* (Oxford, 4th ed., 1892), to which I may not improperly refer the reader on

hardly more than one country in Europe where we find them producing anything that can be called literature. In England Anglo-Saxon, if not exactly dead, is dying, and has for more than a century ceased to produce anything of distinctly literary attraction; and English, even the earliest "middle" English, is scarcely yet born, is certainly far from being in a condition for literary use. The last echoes of the older and more original Icelandic poetry are dying away, and the great product of Icelandic prose, the Saga, still *volitat per ora virum*, without taking a concrete literary form. It is in the highest degree uncertain whether anything properly to be called Spanish or Italian exists at all —anything but dialects of the *lingua rustica* showing traces of what Spanish and Italian are to be; though the originals of the great *Poema del Cid* cannot be far off. German is in something the same trance between

European literature in 1100.

the general subject. But of late years the fashion of dropping the *s* has prevailed, and, therefore, in a book meant for general reading, I follow it here. Those who prefer native authorities will find a recent and excellent one on the whole subject of French literature in M. Lanson, *Histoire de la Littérature Française*, Paris, 1895. For the mediæval period generally M. Gaston Paris, *La Littérature Française au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1888), speaks with unapproached competence; and, still narrowing the range, the subject of the present chapter has been dealt with by M. Léon Gautier, *Les Epopées Françaises* (Paris, 4 vols., 1878-92), in a manner equally learned and loving. M. Gautier has also been intrusted with the section on the *Chansons* in the new and splendidly illustrated collection of monographs (Paris: Colin) which M. Petit de Julleville is editing under the title *Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature Française*. Mr Paget Toynbee's *Specimens of Old French* (Oxford, 1892) will illustrate this and the following chapters.

its "Old" and its "Middle" state as is English. Only in France, and in both the great divisions of French speech, is vernacular literature active. The northern tongue, the *langue d'oïl*, shows us—in actually known existence, or by reasonable inference that it existed—the national epic or *chanson de geste;* the southern, or *langue d'oc*, gives us the Provençal lyric. The latter will receive treatment later, the former must be dealt with at once.

It is rather curious that while the *chansons de geste* are, after Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic poetry, the oldest elaborate example of verse in the modern vernaculars; while they exhibit a character, not indeed one of the widest in range or most engaging in quality, but individual, interesting, intense as few others; while they are entirely the property of one nation, and that a nation specially proud of its literary achievements,—they were almost the last division of European literature to become in any degree properly known. In so far as they were known at all, until within the present century, the knowledge was based almost entirely on later adaptations in verse, and still later in prose; while—the most curious point of all—they were not warmly welcomed by the French even after their discovery, and cannot yet be said to have been taken to the heart of the nation, even to the limited extent to which the Arthurian romances have been taken to the heart of England, much less to that in which the old, but much less old, ballads of England, Scotland, Germany, and Spain have for periods of varying length been welcomed in their respective countries. To dis-

cuss the reason of this at length would lead us out of our present subject; but it is a fact, and a very curious fact.

Late discovery of the chansons.

The romances of Charlemagne, or, to employ their more technical designation, the *chansons de geste*, form a large, a remarkably homogeneous, and a well-separated body of compositions. These, as far as can be decided, date in time from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, with a few belated representatives in the fourteenth; but scarcely, as far as probability shows, with any older members in the tenth. Very little attention of any kind was paid to them, till some seventy years ago, an English scholar,

Their age and history.

Conybeare, known for his services to our own early literature, following the example of another scholar, Tyrwhitt, still earlier and more distinguished, had drawn attention to the merit and interest of, as it happens, the oldest and most remarkable of all. This was the *Chanson de Roland*, which, in this oldest form, exists only in one of the MSS. of the Bodleian Library at Oxford. But they very soon received the care of M. Paulin Paris, the most indefatigable student that in a century of examination of the older European literature any European country has produced, and after more than half a century of enthusiastic resuscitation by M. Paris, by his son M. Gaston, and by others, the whole body of them has been thoroughly overhauled and put at the disposal of those who do not care to read the original, in the four volumes of the remodelled edition of M. Léon Gautier's *Epopées Françaises*, while perhaps a

majority of the actual texts are in print. This is as well, for though a certain monotony is always charged against the *chansons de geste*[1] by those who do not love them, and may be admitted to some extent even by those who do, there are few which have not a more or less distinct character of their own; and even the generic character is not properly to be perceived until a considerable number have been studied.

Their distinguishing character.

The old habit of reading this division of romance in late and travestied versions naturally and necessarily obscured the curious traits of community in form and matter that belong to it, and indeed distinguish it from almost all other departments of literature of the imaginative kind. Its members are frequently spoken of as "the Charlemagne Romances"; and, as a matter of fact, most of them do come into connection with the great prince of the second race in one way or another. Yet Bodel's phrase of *matière de France*[2] is happier. For they are all still more directly connected with French history,

[1] This monotony almost follows from the title. For *geste* in the French is not merely the equivalent of *gesta*, "deeds." It is used for the record of those deeds, and then for the whole class or family of performances and records of them. In this last sense the *gestes* are in chief three—those of the king, of Doon de Mayence, and of Garin de Montglane—besides smaller ones.

[2] Jean Bodel, a *trouvère* of the thirteenth century, furnished literary history with a valuable stock-quotation in the opening of his *Chanson des Saisnes* for the three great divisions of Romance:—

> "Ne sont que trois matières à nul home attendant,
> De France et de Bretaigne et de Rome la grant."
> —*Chanson des Saxons*, ed. Michel, Paris, 1839, vol. i. p. 1.

The lines following, less often quoted, are an interesting early *locus* for French literary patriotism.

seen through a romantic lens; and even the late and half-burlesque *Hugues Capet*, even the extremely interesting and partly contemporary set on the Crusades, as well as such "little *gestes*" as that of the Lorrainers, *Garin le Loherain* and the rest, and the three "great *gestes*" of the king, of the southern hero William of Orange (sometimes called the *geste* of Montglane), and of the family of Doon de Mayence, arrange themselves with no difficulty under this more general heading. And the *chanson de geste* proper, as Frenchmen are entitled to boast, never quite deserts this *matière de France*. It is always the *Gesta Francorum* at home, or the *Gesta Dei per Francos* in the East, that supply the themes. When this subject or group of subjects palled, the very form of the *chanson de geste* was lost. It was not applied to other things;[1] it grew obsolete with that which it had helped to make popular. Some of the material—*Huon of Bordeaux*, the *Four Sons of Aymon*, and others—retained a certain vogue in forms quite different, and gave later ages the inexact and bastard notion of "Charlemagne Romance" which has been referred to. But the *chanson de geste* itself was never, so to speak, "half-known"—except to a very few antiquaries. After its three centuries of flourishing, first alone, then with the other two "matters," it retired altogether, and made its reappearance only after four centuries had passed away.

This fact or set of facts has made the actual nature of the original Charlemagne Romances the subject of

[1] Or only in rare cases to later French history itself—Du Guesclin, and the *Combat des Trente*.

much mistake and misstatement on the part of general historians of literature. The widely read and generally accurate Dunlop knew nothing whatever about them, except in early printed versions representing their very latest form, and in the hopelessly travestied eighteenth-century *Bibliothèque des Romans* of the Comte de Tressan. He therefore assigned to them[1] a position altogether inferior to their real importance, and actually apologised for the writers, in that, coming *after* the Arthurian historians, they were compelled to imitation. As a matter of fact, it is probable that all the most striking and original *chansons de geste*, certainly all those of the best period, were in existence before a single one of the great Arthurian romances was written; and as both the French and English, and even the German, writers of these latter were certainly acquainted with the *chansons*, the imitation, if there were any, must lie on their side. As a matter of fact, however, there is little or none. The later and less genuine *chansons* borrow to some extent the methods and incidents in the romances; but the romances at no time exhibit much resemblance to the *chansons* proper, which have an extremely distinct, racy, and original character of their own. Hallam, writing later than Dunlop, and if with a less wide knowledge of Romance, with a much greater proficiency in general literary history, prac-

Mistakes about them.

[1] Dunlop, *History of Prose Fiction* (ed. Wilson, London, 1888), i. 274-351. Had Dunlop rigidly confined himself to *prose* fiction, the censure in the text might not be quite fair. As a matter of fact, however, he does not, and it would have been impossible for him to do so.

tically passes the *chansons de geste* over altogether in the introduction to his *Literature of Europe*, which purports to summarise all that is important in the *History of the Middle Ages*, and to supplement and correct that book itself.

Their isolation and origin.

The only excuse (besides mere unavoidable ignorance, which, no doubt, is a sufficient one) for this neglect is the curious fact, in itself adding to their interest, that these *chansons*, though a very important chapter in the histories both of poetry and of fiction, form one which is strangely marked off at both ends from all connection, save in point of subject, with literature precedent or subsequent. As to their own origin, the usual abundant, warm, and if it may be said without impertinence, rather futile controversies have prevailed. Practically speaking, we know nothing whatever about the matter. There used to be a theory that the Charlemagne Romances owed their origin more or less directly to the fabulous *Chronicle* of Tilpin or Turpin, the warrior-Archbishop of Rheims. It has now been made tolerably certain that the Latin chronicle on the subject is not anterior even to our existing *Chanson de Roland*, and very probable that it is a good deal later. On the other hand, of actual historical basis we have next to nothing except the mere fact of the death of Roland ("Hruotlandus comes Britanniæ") at the skirmish of Roncesvalles. There are, however, early mentions of certain *cantilenæ* or ballads; and it has been assumed by some scholars that the earliest *chansons* were compounded out of precedent ballads of

the kind. It is unnecessary to inform those who know something of general literary history, that this theory (that the corruption of the ballad is the generation of the epic) is not confined to the present subject, but is one of the favourite fighting-grounds of a certain school of critics. It has been applied to Homer, to *Beowulf*, to the Old and Middle German Romances, and it would be very odd indeed if it had not been applied to the *Chansons de geste*. But it may be said with some confidence that not one tittle of evidence has ever been produced for the existence of any such ballads containing the matter of any of the *chansons* which do exist. The song of Roland which Taillefer sang at Hastings may have been such a ballad: it may have been part of the actual *chanson;* it may have been something quite different. But these "mays" are not evidence; and it cannot but be thought a real misfortune that, instead of confining themselves to an abundant and indeed inexhaustible subject, the proper literary study of what does exist, critics should persist in dealing with what certainly does not, and perhaps never did. On the general point it might be observed that there is rather more positive evidence for the breaking up of the epic into ballads than for the conglomeration of ballads into the epic. But on that point it is not necessary to take sides. The matter of real importance is, to lay it down distinctly that we *have* nothing anterior to the earliest *chansons de geste;* and that we have not even any satisfactory reason for presuming that there ever was anything.

Their metrical form.

One of the reasons, however, which no doubt has been most apt to suggest anterior compositions is the singular completeness of form exhibited by these poems. It is now practically agreed that—scraps and fragments themselves excepted—we have no monument of French in accomplished profane literature more ancient than the *Chanson de Roland.*[1] And the form of this, though from one point of view it may be called rude and simple, is of remarkable perfection in its own way. The poem is written in decasyllabic iambic lines with a cæsura at the second foot, these lines being written with a precision which French indeed never afterwards lost, but which English did not attain till Chaucer's day, and then lost again for more than another century. Further, the grouping and finishing of these lines is not less remarkable, and is even more distinctive than their internal construction. They are not blank; they are not in couplets; they are not in equal stanzas; and they are not (in the earliest examples, such as *Roland*) regularly rhymed. But they are arranged in batches (called in French *laisses* or *tirades*) of no certain number, but varying from one to several score, each of which derives unity from an *assonance*—that is to say, a vowel-rhyme, the consonants of the final syllable varying at discretion. This assonance, which appears to have been common to all Romance tongues

[1] *Editio princeps* by Fr. Michel, 1837. Since that time it has been frequently reprinted, translated, and commented. Those who wish for an exact reproduction of the oldest MS. will find it given by Stengel (Heilbronn, 1878).

in their early stages, disappeared before very long from French, though it continued in Spanish, and is indeed the most distinguishing point of the prosody of that language. Very early in the *chansons* themselves we find it replaced by rhyme, which, however, remains the same for the whole of the *laisse*, no matter how long it is. By degrees, also, the ten-syllabled line (which in some examples has an octosyllabic tail-line not assonanced at the end of every *laisse*) gave way in its turn to the victorious Alexandrine. But the mechanism of the *chanson* admitted no further extensions than the substitution of rhyme for assonance, and of twelve-syllabled lines for ten-syllabled. In all other respects it remained rigidly the same from the eleventh century to the fourteenth, and in the very latest examples of such poems, as *Hugues Capet* and *Baudouin de Sebourc*—full as enthusiasts like M. Gautier complain that they are of a spirit very different from that of the older *chansons*—there is not the slightest change in form; while certain peculiarities of stock phrase and "epic repetition" are jealously preserved. The immense single-rhymed *laisses*, sometimes extending to several pages of verse, still roll rhyme after rhyme with the same sound upon the ear. The common form generally remains; and though the adventures are considerably varied, they still retain a certain general impress of the earlier scheme.

Their scheme of matter.

That scheme is, in the majority of the *chansons*, curiously uniform. It has, since the earliest studies of them, been remarked as odd that Charlemagne, though almost omnipresent (except of

course in the Crusading cycle and a few others), and though such a necessary figure that he is in some cases evidently confounded both with his ancestor Charles Martel and his successor Charles the Bald, plays a part that is very dubiously heroic. He is, indeed, presented with great pomp and circumstance as *li empereres à la barbe florie*, with a gorgeous court, a wide realm, a numerous and brilliant baronage. But his character is far from tenderly treated. In *Roland* itself he appears so little that critics who are not acquainted with many other poems sometimes deny the characteristic we are now discussing. But elsewhere he is much less leniently handled. Indeed the plot of very many *chansons* turns entirely on the ease with which he lends an ear to traitors (treason of various kinds plays an almost ubiquitous part, and the famous "trahis!" is heard in the very dawn of French literature), on his readiness to be biassed by bribes, and on the singular ferocity with which, on the slightest and most unsupported accusation, he is ready to doom any one, from his own family downwards, to block, stake, gallows, or living grave. This combination, indeed, of the irascible and the gullible tempers in the king defrays the plot of a very large number of the *chansons*, in which we see his best knights, and (except that they are as intolerant of injustice as he is prone to it) his most faithful servants, forced into rebellion against him, and almost overwhelmed by his own violence following on the machinations of their and his worst enemies.

The character of Charlemagne.

Nevertheless, Charlemagne is always the defender

of the Cross, and the antagonist of the Saracens, and the part which these latter play is as ubiquitous as his own, and on the whole more considerable. A very large part of the earlier *chansons* is occupied with direct fighting against the heathen; and from an early period (at least if the *Voyage à Constantinople* is, as is supposed, of the early twelfth century, if not the eleventh) a most important element, bringing the class more into contact with romance generally than some others which have been noticed, is introduced in the love of a Saracen princess, daughter of emperor or "admiral" (emir), for one of the Christian heroes. Here again *Roland* stands alone, and though the mention of Aude, Oliver's sister and Roland's betrothed, who dies when she hears of his death, is touching, it is extremely meagre. There is practically nothing but the clash of arms in this remarkable poem. But elsewhere there is, in rather narrow and usual limits, a good deal else. Charlemagne's daughter, and the daughters of peers and paladins, figure: and their characteristics are not very different from those of the pagan damsels. It is, indeed, unnecessary to convert them,—a process to which their miscreant sisters usually submit with great goodwill,—and they are also relieved from the necessity of showing the extreme undutifulness to their more religiously constant sires, which is something of a blot on Paynim princesses like Floripas in *Fierabras*. This heroine exclaims in reference to her father, "He is an old devil, why do you not kill him? little I care for him provided you give me Guy," though it is fair to say

Other characters and characteristics.

that Fierabras himself rebukes her with a "Moult grant tort avès." All these ladies, however, Christian as well as heathen, are as tender to their lovers as they are hard-hearted to their relations; and the relaxation of morality, sometimes complained of in the later *chansons*, is perhaps more technical than real, even remembering the doctrine of the mediæval Church as to the identity, for practical purposes, of betrothal and marriage. On the other hand, the courtesy of the *chansons* is distinctly in a more rudimentary state than that of the succeeding romances. Not only is the harshest language used by knights to ladies,[1] but blows are by no means uncommon; and of what is commonly understood by romantic love there is on the knights' side hardly a trace, unless it be in stories such as that of *Ogier le Danois*, which are obviously late enough to have come under Arthurian influence. The piety, again, which has been so much praised in these *chansons*, is of a curious and rather elementary type. The knights are ready enough to fight to the last gasp, and the last drop of blood, for the Cross; and their faith is as free from flaw as their zeal. *Li Apostoiles de Rome*—the Pope—is recognised without the slightest hesitation as supreme in all religious and most temporal matters. But there is much less reference than in the Arthurian romances, not merely to the mysteries of the Creed, but even to the simple facts of the birth and death of Christ. Except in a few places—such as, for instance, the exquisite and widely popular story of *Amis and*

[1] *V. infra* on the scene in *Aliscans* between William of Orange and his sister Queen Blanchefleur.

Amiles (the earliest vernacular form of which is a true *chanson de geste* of the twelfth century)—there are not many indications of any higher or finer notion of Christianity than that which is confined to the obedient reception of the sacraments, and the cutting off Saracens' heads whensoever they present themselves.[1]

Realist quality.

In manners, as in theology and ethics, there is the same simplicity, which some have called almost barbarous. Architecture and dress receive considerable attention; but in other ways the arts do not seem to be far advanced, and living is still conducted nearly, if not quite, as much in public as in the *Odyssey* or in *Beowulf*. The hall is still the common resort of both sexes by day and of the men at night. Although gold and furs, silk and jewels, are lavished with the usual cheap magnificence of fiction, very few details are given of the minor *supellex* or of ways of living generally. From the *Chanson de Roland* in particular (which, though it is a pity to confine the attention to it as has sometimes been done, is undoubtedly the type of the class in its simplest and purest form) we should learn next to nothing about the state of society depicted, except that its heroes were religious in their fashion, and terrible fighters. But it ought to be added that the perusal of a large number of these *chansons* leaves on the mind a much more genuine belief in their world (if it may so be called) as having for a time actually existed, than that which is created by the

[1] Even the famous and very admirable death-scene of Vivien (again *v. infra*) will not disprove these remarks.

reading of Arthurian romance. That fair vision we know (hardly knowing why or how we know it) to have been a creation of its own Fata Morgana, a structure built of the wishes, the dreams, the ideals of men, but far removed from their actual experience. This is not due to miracles—there are miracles enough in the *chansons de geste* most undoubtingly related: nor to the strange history, geography, and chronology, for the two divisions are very much on a par there also. But strong as the fantastic element is in them, the *chansons de geste* possess a realistic quality which is entirely absent from the gracious idealism of the Romances. The emperors and the admirals, perhaps even their fair and obliging daughters, were not personages unknown to the contemporaries of the Norman conquerors of Italy and Sicily, or to the first Crusaders. The faithful and ferocious, covetous and indomitable, pious and lawless spirit, which hardly dropped the sword except to take up the torch, was, poetic presentation and dressing apart, not so very different from the general temper of man after the break up of the Roman peace till the more or less definite mapping out of Europe into modern divisions. More than one Vivien and one William of Orange listened to Peter the Hermit. In the very isolation of the atmosphere of these romances, in its distance from modern thought and feeling, in its lack (as some have held) of universal quality and transcendent human interest, there is a certain element of strength. It was not above its time, and it therefore does not reach the highest forms of literature. But it was intensely *of*

its time; and thus it far exceeds the lowest kinds, and retains an abiding value even apart from the distinct, the high, and the very curious perfection, within narrow limits, of its peculiar form.

Volume and age of the chansons.

It is probable that very few persons who are not specially acquainted with the subject are at all aware of the enormous bulk and number of these poems, even if their later *remaniements* (as they are called) both in verse and prose—fourteenth and fifteenth century refashionings, which in every case meant a large extension—be left out of consideration. The most complete list published, that of M. Léon Gautier, enumerates 110. Of these he himself places only the *Chanson de Roland* in the eleventh century, perhaps as early as the Norman Conquest of England, certainly not later than 1095. To the twelfth he assigns (and it may be observed that, enthusiastic as M. Gautier is on the literary side, he shows on all questions of age, &c., a wariness not always exhibited by scholars more exclusively philological) *Acquin*, *Aliscans*, *Amis et Amiles*, *Antioche Aspremont*, *Auberi le Bourgoing*, *Aye d'Avignon*, the *Bataille Loquifer*, the oldest (now only known in Italian) form of *Berte aus grans Piés*, *Beuves d'Hanstone* (with another Italian form more or less independent), the *Charroi de Nîmes*, *Les Chétifs*, the *Chevalerie Ogier de Danemarche*, the *Chevalerie Vivien* (otherwise known as *Covenant Vivien*), the major part (also known by separate titles) of the *Chevalier au Cygne*, *La Conquête de la Petite Bretagne* (another form of *Acquin*), the *Couronnement Loys*, *Doon de la Roche*, *Doon*

Twelfth century.

de Nanteuil, the *Enfances Charlemagne*, the *Enfances Godefroi*, the *Enfances Roland*, the *Enfances Ogier*, *Floovant*, *Garin le Loherain*, *Garnier de Nanteuil*, *Giratz de Rossilho*, *Girbert de Metz*, *Gui de Bourgogne*, *Gui de Nanteuil*, *Helias*, *Hervis de Metz*, the oldest form of *Huon de Bordeaux*, *Jérusalem*, *Jourdains de Blaivies*, the Lorraine cycle, including *Garin*, &c., *Macaire*, *Mainet*, the *Moniage Guillaume*, the *Moniage Rainoart*, *Orson de Beauvais*, *Rainoart*, *Raoul de Cambrai*, *Les Saisnes*, the *Siège de Barbastre*, *Syracon*, and the *Voyage de Charlemagne*. In other words, nearly half the total number date from the twelfth century, if not even earlier.

Thirteenth century.

By far the larger number of the rest are not later than the thirteenth. They include—*Aimeri de Narbonne*, *Aiol*, *Anséis de Carthage*, *Anséis Fils de Gerbert*, *Auberon*, *Berte aus grans Piés* in its present French form, *Beton et Daurel*, *Beuves de Commarchis*, the *Departement des Enfans Aimeri*, the *Destruction de Rome*, *Doon de Mayence*, *Elie de Saint Gilles*, the *Enfances Doon de Mayence*, the *Enfances Guillaume*, the *Enfances Vivien*, the *Entrée en Espagne*, *Fierabras*, *Foulques de Candie*, *Gaydon*, *Garin de Montglane*, *Gaufrey*, *Gérard de Viane*, *Guibert d'Andrenas*, *Jehan de Lanson*, *Maugis d'Aigremont*, the *Mort Aimeri de Narbonne*, *Otinel*, *Parise la Duchesse*, the *Prise de Cordres*, the *Prise de Pampelune*, the *Quatre Fils d'Aymon*, *Renaud de Montauban* (a variant of the same), *Renier*, the later forms of the *Chanson de Roland*, to which the name of *Roncevaux* is sometimes given for the sake of distinction, the *Siège de*

Narbonne, Simon de Pouille, Vivien l'Amachour de Montbranc, and *Yon.*

Fourteenth, and later.

By this the list is almost exhausted. The fourteenth century, though fruitful in *remaniements,* sometimes in mono-rhymed tirades, but often in Alexandrine couplets and other changed shapes, contributes hardly anything original except the very interesting and rather brilliant last branches of the *Chevalier au Cygne—Baudouin de Sebourc,* and the *Bastart de Bouillon; Hugues Capet,* a very lively and readable but slightly vulgar thing, exhibiting an almost undisguised tone of parody; and some fragments known by the names of *Hernaut de Beaulande, Renier de Gennes,* &c. As for fifteenth and sixteenth century work, though some pieces of it, especially the very long and unprinted poem of *Lion de Bourges,* are included in the canon, all the *chanson*-production of this time is properly apocryphal, and has little or nothing left of the *chanson* spirit, and only the shell of the *chanson* form.

Chansons in print.

It must further be remembered that, with the exception of a very few in fragmentary condition, all these poems are of great length. Only the later or less genuine, indeed, run to the preposterous extent of twenty, thirty, or (it is said in the case of *Lion de Bourges*) sixty thousand lines. But *Roland* itself, one of the shortest, has four thousand; *Aliscans,* which is certainly old, eight thousand; the oldest known form of *Huon,* ten thousand. It is probably not excessive to put the average length of the older *chansons* at six thousand lines; while if the

more recent be thrown in, the average of the whole hundred would probably be doubled.

This immense body of verse, which for many reasons it is very desirable to study as a whole, is still, after the best part of a century, to a great extent unprinted, and (as was unavoidable) such of its constituents as have been sent to press have been dealt with on no very uniform principles. It was less inevitable, and is more to be regretted, that the dissensions of scholars on minute philological points have caused the repeated printing of certain texts, while others have remained inaccessible; and it cannot but be regarded as a kind of petty treason to literature thus to put the satisfaction of private crotchets before the "unlocking of the word-hoard" to the utmost possible extent. The earliest *chansons* printed[1] were, I believe, M. Paulin Paris's *Berte aus grans Piés*, M. Francisque Michel's *Roland;* and thereafter these two scholars and others edited for M. Techener a very handsome set of "Romances des Douze Pairs," as they were called, including *Les Saisnes*, *Ogier*, *Raoul de Cambrai*, *Garin*, and the two great crusading *chansons*, *Antioche* and *Jérusalem*. Other scattered efforts were made, such as the publication of a beautiful edition of *Baudouin de Sebourc* at Valenciennes as early as 1841; while a Belgian scholar, M. de Reiffenberg, published *Le Chevalier au Cygne*, and a Dutch one, Dr Jonckbloët, gave a large part of the later numbers of the Garin de Montglane cycle in his *Guillaume d'Orange* (2 vols., The Hague, 1854). But

[1] Immanuel Bekker had printed the Provençal *Fierabras* as early as 1829.

the great opportunity came soon after the accession of Napoleon III., when a Minister favourable to literature, M. Fortoul, gave, in a moment of enthusiasm, permission to publish the entire body of the *chansons*. Perfect wisdom would probably have decreed the acceptance of the godsend by issuing the whole, with a minimum of editorial apparatus, in some such form as that of our Chalmers's Poets, the bulk of which need probably not have been exceeded in order to give the oldest forms of every real *chanson* from *Roland* to the *Bastart de Bouillon*. But perfect wisdom is not invariably present in the councils of men, and the actual result took the form of ten agreeable little volumes, in the type, shape, and paper of the "Bibliothèque Elzévirienne with abundant editorial matter, paraphrases in modern French, and the like. *Les Anciens Poètes de la France*, as this series was called, appeared between 1858, which saw the first volume, and 1870, which fatal year saw the last, for the Republic had no money to spare for such monarchical glories as the *chansons*. They are no contemptible possession; for the ten volumes give fourteen *chansons* of very different ages, and rather interestingly representative of different kinds. But they are a very small portion of the whole, and in at least one instance, *Aliscans*, they double on a former edition. Since then the Société des Anciens Textes Français has edited some *chansons*, and independent German and French scholars have given some more; but no systematic attempt has been made to fill the gaps, and the pernicious system of re-editing, on pretext of wrong

selection of MSS. or the like, has continued. Nevertheless, the number of *chansons* actually available is so large that no general characteristic is likely to have escaped notice; while from the accounts of the remaining MSS., it would not appear that any of those unprinted can rank with the very best of those already known. Among these very best I should rank in alphabetical order—*Aliscans*, *Amis et Amiles*, *Antioche*, *Baudouin de Sebourc* (though in a mixed kind), *Berte aus grans Piés*, *Fierabras*, *Garin le Loherain*, *Gérard de Roussillon*, *Huon de Bordeaux*, *Ogier de Danemarche*, *Raoul de Cambrai*, *Roland*, and the *Voyage de Charlemagne à Constantinople*. The almost solitary eminence assigned by some critics to *Roland* is not, I think, justified, and comes chiefly from their not being acquainted with many others; though the poem has undoubtedly the merit of being the oldest, and perhaps that of presenting the *chanson* spirit in its best and most unadulterated, as well as the *chanson* form at its simplest, sharpest, and first state. Nor is there anywhere a finer passage than the death of Roland, though there are many not less fine.

It may, however, seem proper, if not even positively indispensable, to give some more general particulars about these *chansons* before analysing specimens or giving arguments of one or more; for they are full of curiosities.

Language. Oc and oïl.

In the first place, it will be noticed by careful readers of the list above given, that these compositions are not limited to French proper or to the *langue d'oïl*, though infinitely the greater part of

them are in that tongue. Indeed, for some time after attention had been drawn to them, and before their actual natures and contents had been thoroughly examined, there was a theory that they were Provençal in origin. This, though it was chiefly due to the fact that Raynouard, Fauriel, and other early students of old French had a strong southern leaning, had some other excuses. It is a fact that Provençal was earlier in its development than French; and whether by irregular tradition of this fact, or owing to ignorance, or from anti-French prejudice (which, however, would not apply in France itself), the part of the *langue d'oc* in the early literature of Europe was for centuries largely overvalued. Then came the usual reaction, and some fifty years ago or so one of the most capable of literary students declared roundly that the Provençal epic had "le défaut d'être perdu." That is not quite true. There is, as noted above, a Provençal *Fierabras*, though it is beyond doubt an adaptation of the French; *Betonnet d'Hanstone* or *Beton et Daurel* only exists in Provençal, though there is again no doubt of its being borrowed; and, lastly, the oldest existing, and probably the original, form of *Gérard de Roussillon*, *Giratz de Rossilho*, is, as its title implies, Provençal, though it is in a dialect more approaching to the *langue d'oïl* than any form of *oc*, and even presents the curious peculiarity of existing in two forms, one leaning to Provençal, the other to French. But these very facts, though they show the statement that "the Provençal epic is lost" to be excessive, yet go almost farther than a total deficiency in proving that the *chanson de geste* was not originally

Provençal. Had it been otherwise, there can be no possible reason why a bare three per cent of the existing examples should be in the southern tongue, while two of these are evidently translations, and the third was as evidently written on the very northern borders of the "Limousin" district.

Italian.

The next fact—one almost more interesting, inasmuch as it bears on that community of Romance tongues of which we have evidence in Dante,[1] and perhaps also makes for the antiquity of the Charlemagne story in its primitive form—is the existence of *chansons* in Italian, and, it may be added, in a most curious bastard speech which is neither French, nor Provençal, nor Italian, but French Italicised in part.[2] The substance, moreover, of the Charlemagne stories was very early naturalised in Italy in the form of a sort of abstract or compilation called the *Reali di Francia*,[3] which in various forms maintained popularity through mediæval and early modern times, and undoubtedly exercised much influence on the great Italian poets of the Renaissance. They were also diffused throughout Europe, the *Carlamagnus Saga* in Iceland marking their farthest actual as well as possible limit, though they never in Germany attained anything like the popularity of the Arthurian legend, and though the Spaniards, patriotically resenting the frequent forays into Spain to which

[1] *V.* the famous and all-important ninth chapter of the first book of the *De Vulgari Eloquio.*

[2] See especially *Macaire*, ed. Guessard, Paris, 1860.

[3] So also the *geste* of Montglane became the *Nerbonesi.*

the *chansons* bear witness, and availing themselves of the confession of disaster at Roncesvalles, set up a counter-story in which Roland is personally worsted by Bernardo del Carpio, and the quarrels of the paynims are taken up by Spain herself. In England the imitations, though fairly numerous, are rather late. They have been completely edited for the Early English Text Society, and consist (for Bevis of Hampton has little relation with its *chanson* namesake save the name) of *Sir Ferumbras* (*Fierabras*), *The Siege of Milan*, *Sir Otuel* (two forms), the *Life of Charles the Great*, *The Soudone of Babylone*, *Huon of Bordeaux*, and *The Four Sons of Aymon*, besides a very curious semi-original entitled *Rauf Coilzear* (Collier), in which the well-known romance-*donnée* of the king visiting some obscure person is applied to Charlemagne. Of these, one, the version of *Huon of Bordeaux*,[1] is literature of no mean kind; but this is because it was executed by Lord Berners, long after our present period. Also, being of that date, it represents the latest French form of the story, which was a very popular one, and incorporated very large borrowings from other sources (the loadstone rock, the punishment of Cain, and so forth) which are foreign to the subject and substance of the *chansons* proper.

Diffusion of the chansons.

Their authorship and publication.

Very great pains have been spent on the question of the authorship, publication, or performance of these compositions. As is the case with so much mediæval work, the great mass

[1] Ed. S. Lee, London, 1883-86.

of them is entirely anonymous. A line which concludes, or rather supplements, *Roland*—

"Ci falt la geste que Turoldus declinet"—

has been the occasion of the shedding of a very great deal of ink. The enthusiastic inquisitiveness of some has ferreted about in all directions for Turolds, Thorolds, or Therouldes, in the eleventh century, and discovering them even among the companions of the Conqueror himself, has started the question whether Taillefer was or was not violating the copyright of his comrade at Hastings. The fact is, however, that the best authorities are very much at sea as to the meaning of *declinet*, which, though it must signify "go over," "tell like a bead-roll," in some way or other, might be susceptible of application to authorship, recitation, or even copying. In some other cases, however, we have more positive testimony, though they are in a great minority. Graindor of Douai refashioned the work of Richard the Pilgrim, an actual partaker of the first Crusade, into the present *Antioche*, *Jérusalem*, and perhaps *Les Chétifs*. Either Richard or Graindor must have been one of the very best poets of the whole cycle. Jehan de Flagy wrote the spirited *Garin le Loherain;* and Jehan Bodel of Arras *Les Saisnes*. Adenès le Roi, a *trouvère*, of whose actual position in the world we know a little, wrote or refashioned three or four *chansons* of the thirteenth century, including *Berte aus grans Piés*, and one of the forms of part of *Ogier*. Other names — Bertrand of Bar sur Aube, Pierre de Rieu, Gerard d'Amiens, Raimbert de Paris,

Brianchon (almost a character of Balzac!), Gautier of Douai, Nicolas of Padua (an interesting person who was warned in a dream to save his soul by compiling a *chanson*), Herbert of Dammartin, Guillaume de Bapaume, Huon de Villeneuve—are mere shadows of names to which in nearly all cases no personality attaches, and which may be as often those of mere *jongleurs* as of actual poets.

No subject, however, in connection with these *chansons de geste* has occupied more attention than the precise mode of what has been called above their "authorship, publication, or performance." They are called *chansons*, and there is no doubt at all that in their inception, and during the earlier and better part of their history, they strictly deserved the name, having been written not to be read but to be sung or recited. To a certain extent, of course, this was the case with all the lighter literature of mediæval times. Far later than our present period the English metrical romances almost invariably begin with the minstrel's invocation, "Listen, lordings," varied according to his taste, fancy, and metre; and what was then partly a tradition, was two or three hundred years earlier the simple record of a universal practice. Since the early days of the Romantic revival, even to the present time, the minutest details of this singing and recitation have been the subject of endless wrangling; and even the point whether it was "singing" or "recitation" has been argued. In a wider and calmer view these things become of very small interest. Singing and recitation

Their performance.

—as the very word recitative should be enough to remind any one—pass into each other by degrees imperceptible to any but a technical ear; and the instruments, if any, which accompanied the performance of the *chansons*, the extent of that accompaniment, and the rest, concern, if they concern history at all, the history of music, not that of literature.

Hearing, not reading, the object.

But it is a matter of quite other importance that, as has been said, lighter mediæval literature generally, and the *chansons* in particular, were meant for the ear, not the eye—to be heard, not to be read. For this intention very closely concerns some of their most important literary characteristics. It is certain as a matter of fact, though it might not be very easy to account for it as a matter of argument, that repetitions, stock phrases, identity of scheme and form, which are apt to be felt as disagreeable in reading, are far less irksome, and even have a certain attraction, in matter orally delivered. Whether that slower irritation of the mind through the ear of which Horace speaks supplies the explanation may be left undiscussed. But it is certain that, especially for uneducated hearers (who in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, if not in the thirteenth, must have been the enormous majority), not merely the phraseological but the rhythmical peculiarities of the *chansons* would be specially suitable. In particular, the long maintenance of the mono-rhymed, or even the single-assonanced, *tirade* depends almost entirely upon its being delivered *vivâ voce*. Only then does

Effect on prosody.

that wave-clash which has been spoken of produce its effect, while the unbroken uniformity of rhyme on the printed page, and the apparent absence of uniformity in the printed assonances, are almost equally annoying to the eye. Nor is it unimportant or superfluous to note that this oral literature had, in the Teutonic countries and in England more especially, an immense influence (hitherto not nearly enough allowed for by literary historians) in the great change from a stressed and alliterative to a quantitative and rhymed prosody, which took place, with us, from about 1200 A.D. Accustomed as were the ears of all to quantitative (though very licentiously quantitative) and rhymed measures in the hymns and services of the Church—the one literary exercise to which gentle and simple, learned and unlearned, were constantly and regularly addicted—it was almost impossible that they should not demand a similar prosody in the profaner compositions addressed to them. That this would not affect the *chansons* themselves is true enough; for there are no relics of any alliterative prosody in French, and its accentual scanning is only the naturally "crumbled" quantity of Latin. But it is extremely important to note that the metre of these *chansons* themselves, single-rhyme and all, directly influenced English writers. Of this, however, more will be found in the chapter on the rise of English literature proper.

The jongleurs.

Another, and for literature a hardly less important, consequence of this intention of being heard, was that probably from the very first, and certainly from an early period, a distinction, not very

different from that afterwards occasioned by the drama, took place between the *trouvère* who invented the *chanson* and the *jongleur* or minstrel who introduced it. At first these parts may, for better or worse, have been doubled. But it would seldom happen that the poet who had the wits to indite would have the skill to perform; and it would happen still seldomer that those whose gifts lay in the direction of interpretation would have the poetical spirit. Nor is it wonderful that, in the poems themselves, we find considerably more about the performer than about the author. In the cases where they were identical, the author would evidently be merged in the actor; in cases where they were not, the actor would take care of himself. Accordingly, though we know if possible even less of the names of the *jongleurs* than of those of the *trouvères*, we know a good deal about their methods. Very rarely does an author like Nicolas of Padua (*v. supra*) tell us so much as his motive for composing the poems. But the patient study of critics, eked out it may be by a little imagination here and there, has succeeded in elaborating a fairly complete account of the ways and fortunes of the *jongleur*, who also not improbably, even where he was not the author, adjusted to the *chansons* which were his copyright, extempore *codas*, episodes, tags, and gags of different kinds. Immense pains have been spent upon the *jongleur*. It has been asserted, and it is not improbable, that during the palmiest days—say the eleventh and twelfth centuries—of the *chansons* a special order of the *jongleur* or minstrel hierarchy concerned itself with them,—it is at least certain that

the phrase *chanter de geste* occurs several times in a manner, and with a context, which seem to justify its being regarded as a special term of art. And the authors at least present their heroes as deliberately expecting that they will be sung about, and fearing the chance of a dishonourable mention; a fact which, though we must not base any calculations upon it as to the actual sentiments of Roland or Ogier, Raoul or Huon, is a fact in itself. And it is also a fact that in the *fabliaux* and other light verse of the time we find *jongleurs* presented as boasting of the particular *chansons* they can sing.

Jongleresses, &c.

But the enumeration of the kinds of *jongleurs*—those itinerant, those attached to courts and great families, &c.—would lead us too far. They were not all of one sex, and we hear of *jongleresses* and *chanteresses*, such as Adeline who figures in the history of the Norman Conquest, Aiglantine who sang before the Duke of Burgundy, Gracieuse d'Espagne, and so forth—pretty names, as even M. Gautier, who is inclined to be suspicious of them, admits. These suspicions, it is fair to say, were felt at the time. Don Jayme of Aragon forbade noble ladies to kiss *jongleresses* or share bed and board with them; while the Church, which never loved the *jongleur* much, decided that the duty of a wife to follow her husband ceased if he took to jongling, which was a *vita turpis et inhonesta*. Further, the pains above referred to, bestowed by scholars of all sorts, from Percy downwards, have discovered or guessed at the clothes which the *jongleur* and his

mate wore, and the instruments with which they accompanied their songs. It is more germane to our purpose to know, as we do in one instance on positive testimony, the principles (easily to be guessed, by the way) on which the introduction of names into these poems were arranged. It appears, on the authority of the historian of Guisnes and Ardres, that Arnold the Old, Count of Ardres, would actually have had his name in the *Chanson d'Antioche* had he not refused a pair of scarlet boots or breeches to the poet or performer thereof. Nor is it more surprising to find, on the still more indisputable authority of passages in the *chansons* themselves, that the *jongleur* would stop singing at an interesting point to make a collection, and would even sometimes explicitly protest against the contribution of too small coins—*poitevines*, *mailles*, and the like.

It is impossible not to regard with a mixture of respect and pity the labour which has been spent on collecting details of the kind whereof, in the last paragraph or two, a few examples have been given. But they really have very little, if anything, to do with literature; and what they have to do with it is common to all times and subjects. The excessive prodigality to minstrels of which we have record parallels itself in other times in regard to actors, jockeys, musicians, and other classes of mechanical pleasure-makers whose craft happens to be popular for the moment. And it was never more likely to be shown than in the Middle Ages, when generosity was a profane virtue; when the Church had set the ex-

ample—an example the too free extension of which she resented highly—of putting reckless giving above almost all other good deeds; and when the system of private war, of ransoms and other things of the same kind, made "light come, light go," a maxim almost more applicable than in the days of confiscations, in those of pensions on this or that list, or in those of stock-jobbing. Moreover, inquirers into this matter have certainly not escaped the besetting sin of all but strictly political historians—a sin which even the political historian has not always avoided—the sin of mixing up times and epochs.

It is the great advantage of that purely literary criticism, which is so little practised and to some extent so unpopular, that it is able to preserve accuracy in this matter. When with the assistance (always to be gratefully received) of philologists and historians in the strict sense the date of a literary work is ascertained with sufficient—it is only in a few cases that it can be ascertained with absolute—exactness, the historian of literature places it in that position for literary purposes only, and neither mixes it with other things nor endeavours to use it for purposes other than literary. To recur to an example mentioned above, Adeline in the eleventh century and Gracieuse d'Espagne in the fifteenth are agreeable objects of contemplation and ornaments of discourse; but, once more, neither has much, if anything, to do with literature.

Singularity of the chansons.

We may therefore with advantage, having made this digression to comply a little with prevalent fashions, return to the *chansons* themselves, to the half-million or million verses of majestic

cadence written in one of the noblest languages, for at least first effect, to be found in the history of the world, possessing that character of distinction, of separate and unique peculiarity in matter and form, which has such extraordinary charm, and endowed besides, more perhaps than any other division, with the attraction of presenting an utterly vanished Past. The late Mr Froude found in church-bells—the echo of the Middle Ages—suggestion of such a vanishing. To some of us there is nothing dead in church-bells; there is only in them, as in the Arthurian legends, for instance, a perennial thing still presented in associations, all the more charming for being slightly antique. But the *chansons de geste*, living by the poetry of their best examples, by the fire of their sentiment, by the clash and clang of their music, are still in thought, in connection with manners, hopes, aims, almost more dead than any of the classics. The literary misjudgment of them which was possible in quite recent times, to two such critics—very different, but each of the first class—as Mr Matthew Arnold and M. Ferdinand Brunetière, is half excused by this curious feature in their own literary character. More than mummies or catacombs, more than Herculaneum and Pompeii, they bring us face to face with something so remote and afar that we can hardly realise it at all. It may be that that peculiarity of the French genius, which, despite its unsurpassed and almost unmatched literary faculty, has prevented it from contributing any of the very greatest masterpieces to the literature of the world, has communicated to them this aloofness, this, as it may almost be called, provincialism. But

some such note there is in them, and it may be that the immense stretch of time during which they were worse than unknown—misknown—has brought it about.

Their charm.

Yet their interest is not the less; it is perhaps even the more. It is nearly twenty years since I began to read them, and during that period I have also been reading masses of other literature from other times, nations, and languages; yet I cannot at this moment take up one without being carried away by the stately language, as precise and well proportioned as modern French, yet with much of the grandeur which modern French lacks, the statelier metre, the noble phrase, the noble incident and passion. Take, for instance, one of the crowning moments, for there are several, of the death-scene of Roland, that where the hero discovers the dead archbishop, with his hands—"the white, the beautiful"—crossed on his breast:—

"Li quenz Rollanz revient de pasmeisuns,
Sur piez se drecet, mais il ad grant dulur;
Guardet aval e si guardet amunt;
Sur l'erbe verte, ultre ses cumpaignuns,
La veit gesir le nobile barun:
C'est l'arcevesque que deus mist en sun num,
Claimet sa culpe, si regardet amunt,
Cuntre le ciel ainsdoux ses mains ad juinz,
Si priet deu que pareis li duinst.
Morz est Turpin le guerrier Charlun.
Par granz batailles e par mult bels sermuns
Contre paiens fut tuz tens campiuns.
Deus li otreit seinte beneïçun.
Aoi!"[1]

[1] *Roland*, ll. 2233-2246.

Then turn to, perhaps, the very last poem which can be called a *chanson de geste* proper in style, *Le Bastart de Bouillon*, and open on these lines :—

"Pardevant la chité qui Miekes[1] fut clamée
Fu grande la bataille, et fière la mellée,
Enchois car on eust nulle tente levée,
Commencha li debas à chelle matinée.
Li cinc frere paien i mainent grant huée,
Il keurent par accort, chascuns tenoit l'espée,
Et une forte targe à son col acolée.
Esclamars va ferir sans nulle demorée,
Un gentil crestien de France l'onnerée—
Armeïre n'i vault une pomme pelée ;
Sus le senestre espaulle fu la chars atamée,
Le branc li embati par dedans la corée,[2]
Mort l'abat du cheval ; son ame soit sauvée !"[3]

This is in no way a specially fine passage, it is the very "padding" of the average *chanson*, but what padding it is! Compare the mere sound, the clash and clang of the verse, with the ordinary English romance in *Sir Thopas* metre, or even with the Italian poets. How alert, how succinct, how finished it is beside the slip-shodness of the first, in too many instances ;[4] how manly, how intense, beside the mere sweetness of the second! The very ring of the lines brings mail-shirt and flat-topped helmet before us.

But in order to the proper comprehension of this

[1] *I.e.*, Mecca.

[2] *Corée* is not merely = *cœur*, but heart, liver, and all the upper "inwards."

[3] *Li Bastars de Bouillon* (ed. Scheler, Brussels, 1877).

[4] Not always ; for the English romance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries has on the whole been too harshly dealt with. But its *average* is far below that of the *chansons*.

section of literature, it is necessary that something more should be said as well of the matter at large as of the construction and contents of separate poems; and, most of all, of the singular process of adjustment of these separate poems by which the *geste* proper (that is to say, the subdivision of the whole which deals more or less distinctly with a single subject) is constituted. Here again we find a "difference" of the poems in the strict logical sense. The total mass of the Arthurian story may be, though more probably it is not, as large as that of the Charlemagne romances, and it may well seem to some of superior literary interest. But from its very nature, perhaps from the very nature of its excellence, it lacks this special feature of the *chansons de geste*. Arthur may or may not be a greater figure in himself than Charlemagne; but when the genius of Map (or of some one else) had hit upon the real knotting and unknotting of the story—the connection of the frailty of Guinevere with the Quest for the Grail—complete developments of the fates of minor heroes, elaborate closings of minor incidents, became futile. Endless stories could be keyed or geared on to different parts of the main legend: there might be a Tristan-saga, a Palomides-saga, a Gawain-saga, episodes of Balin or of Beaumains, incidents of the fate of the damsel of Astolat or the resipiscence of Geraint. But the central interest was too artistically complete to allow any of these to occupy very much independent space.

Peculiarity of the geste system.

In our present subject, on the other hand, even Charlemagne's life is less the object of the story than

the history of France; and enormous as the falsification of that history may seem to modern criticism, the writers always in a certain sense remembered that they were historians. When an interesting and important personality presented itself, it was their duty to follow it out to the end, to fill up the gaps of forerunners, to round it off and shade it in.[1] Thus it happens that the *geste* or saga of *Guillaume d'Orange*—which is itself not the whole of the great *geste* of Garin de Montglane — occupies eighteen separate poems, some of them of great length; that the crusading series, beginning no doubt in a simple historical poem, which was extended and "cycled," has seven, the Lorraine group five; while in the extraordinary monument of industry and enthusiasm which for some eight hundred pages M. Léon Gautier has devoted to the king's *geste*, twenty-seven different *chansons* are more or less abstracted. Several others might have been added here if M. Gautier had laid down less strict rules of exclusion against mere *romans d'aventures* subsequently tied on, like the above-mentioned outlying romances of the Arthurian group, to the main subject.

Instances.

It seems necessary, therefore, or at least desirable, especially as these poems are still far too little known to English readers, to give in the first place a more or less detailed account of one of the groups; in the second, a still

Summary of the geste of William of Orange.

[1] This will explain the frequent recurrence of the title "*Enfances* ——" in the list given above. A hero had become interesting in some exploit of his manhood: so they harked back to his childhood.

more detailed account of a particular *chanson*, which to be fully illustrative should probably be a member of this group; and lastly, some remarks on the more noteworthy and accessible (for it is ill speaking at second-hand from accounts of manuscripts) of the remaining poems. For the first purpose nothing can be better than *Guillaume d'Orange*, many, though not all, of the constituents of which are in print, and which has had the great advantage of being systematically treated by more than one or two of the most competent scholars of the century on the subject—Dr Jonckbloët, MM. Guessard and A. de Montaiglon, and M. Gautier himself. Of this group the short, very old, and very characteristic *Couronnement Loys* will supply a good subject for more particular treatment, a subject all the more desirable that *Roland* may be said to be comparatively familiar, and is accessible in English translations.

And first of the Couronnement Loys.

The poem as we have it[1] begins with a double exordium, from which the *jongleur* might perhaps choose as from alternative collects in a liturgy. Each is ten lines long, and while the first rhymes throughout, the second has only a very imperfect assonance. Each bespeaks attention and promises satisfaction in the usual manner, though in different terms—

"Oez seignor que Dex vos soit aidant;"

"Seignor baron, pleroit vos d'un exemple!"

A much less commonplace note is struck immediately

[1] Ed. Jonckbloët, *op. cit.*, i. 1-71.

afterwards in what may be excusably taken to be the real beginning of the poem:—

> "A king who wears our France's crown of gold
> Worthy must be, and of his body bold;
> What man soe'er to him do evil wold,
> He may not quit in any manner hold
> Till he be dead or to his mercy yold.
> Else France shall lose her praise she hath of old.
> Falsely he's crowned: so hath our story told."

Then the story itself is plunged into in right style. When the chapel was blessed at Aix and the minster dedicated and made, there was a mighty court held. Poor and rich received justice; eighteen bishops, as many archbishops, twenty-six abbots, and four crowned kings attended; the Pope of Rome himself said mass; and Louis, son of Charlemagne, was brought up to the high altar where the crown was laid. At this moment the people are informed that Charles feels his death approaching, and must hand over his kingdom to his son. They thank God that no strange king is to come on them. But when the emperor, after good advice as to life and policy, bids him not dare to take the crown unless he is prepared for a clean and valiant life, the infant (*li enfes*) does not dare. The people weep, and the king storms, declaring that the prince is no son of his and shall be made a monk. But Hernaut of Orleans, a great noble, strikes in, and pretending to plead for Louis on the score of his extreme youth, offers to take the regency for three years, when, if the prince has become a good knight, he shall have the kingdom back, and in increased good condition.

Charlemagne, with the singular proneness to be victim of any kind of "confidence trick" which he shows throughout the *chansons*, is turning a willing ear to this proposition when William of Orange enters, and, wroth at the notion, thinks of striking off Hernaut's head. But remembering

"Que d'ome occire est trop mortex péchiés,"

he changes his plan and only pummels him to death with his fists, a distinction which seems indifferential. Then he takes the crown himself, places it on the boy's head, and Charles accommodates himself to this proceeding as easily as to the other proposal.

Five years pass: and it is a question, not of the mere choice of a successor or assessor, but of actual death. He repeats his counsels to his son, with the additional and very natural warning to rely on William. Unluckily this chief, who is in the earlier part of the *chanson* surnamed Firebrace (not to be confounded with the converted Saracen of that name), is not at the actual time of the king's death at Aix, but has gone on pilgrimage, in fulfilment of a vow, to Rome. He comes at a good time, for the Saracens have just invaded Italy, have overthrown the King of Apulia with great slaughter, and are close to Rome. The Pope (the "Apostle") hears of William, and implores his succour, which, though he has but forty knights and the Saracens are in their usual thousands, he consents to give. The Pope promises him as a reward that he may eat meat all the days of his life, and take as many wives as he chooses,—a method of

guerdon which shocks M. Gautier, the most orthodox as well as not the least scholarly of scholars. Moreover, the Holy Father also wishes to buy off the heathen, thereby showing a truly apostolic ignorance of the world. Galafré, the "admiral," however has a point of honour. He will not be bought off. He informs the Pope, calling him "Sir with the big hat,"[1] that he is a descendant of Romulus and Julius Cæsar, and for that reason feels it necessary to destroy Rome and its clerks who serve God. He relents, however, so far as to propose to decide the matter by single combat, to which the Pope, according to all but nineteenth century sentiment, very properly consents. William is, of course, the Christian champion; the Saracen is a giant named Corsolt, very hideous, very violent, and a sort of Mahometan Capaneus in his language. The Pope does not entirely trust in William's valour, but rubs him all over with St Peter's arm, which confers invulnerability. Unfortunately the "promontory of the face" is omitted. The battle is fierce, but not long. Corsolt cuts off the uncharmed tip of William's nose (whence his epic surname of Guillaume au Court Nez), but William cuts off Corsolt's head. The Saracens fly: William (he has joked rather ruefully with the Pope on his misadventure, which, as being a recognised form of punishment, was almost a disgrace even when honourably incurred) pursues them, captures Galafré, converts him at point of sword, and receives from him the offer of his beautiful daughter. The marriage is

[1] "Parlez à moi, sire au chaperon large."—*C.L.*, l. 468.

about to be celebrated, William and the Saracen princess are actually at the altar, when a messenger from Louis arrives claiming the champion's help against the traitors who already wish to wrest the sceptre from his hand. William asks the Pope what he is to do, and the Pope says "Go":

> " Guillaumes bese la dame o le vis cler,
> Et ele lui ; ne cesse deplorer.
> Par tel covent ensi sont dessevré,
> Puis ne se virent en trestot leur aé."

Promptly as he acts, however, he is only in time to repair, not to prevent, the mischief. The rebels have already dethroned Louis and imprisoned him at St Martins in Tours, making Acelin of Rouen, son of Richard, Emperor. William makes straight for Tours, prevails on the castellan of the gate-fortress to let him in, kicks — literally kicks — the monks out of their abbey, and rescues Louis. He then kills Acelin, violently maltreats his father, and rapidly traverses the whole of France, reducing the malcontents.

Peace having been for the time restored at home, William returns to Rome, where many things have happened. The Pope and Galafré are dead, the princess, though she is faithful to William, has other suitors, and there is a fresh invasion, not this time of heathen Asiatics, but led by Guy of Germany. The Count of Orange forces Louis (who behaves in a manner justifying the rebels) to accompany him with a great army to Rome, defeats the Germans, takes his *fainéant* emperor's part in a single combat with Guy, and is again victorious. Nor, though he has

to treat his pusillanimous sovereign in an exceedingly cavalier fashion, does he fail to have Louis crowned again as Emperor of Rome. A fresh rebellion breaking out in France, he again subdues it; and strengthens the tottering house of Charles Martel by giving his own sister Blanchefleur to the chicken-hearted king.

> "En grant barnage fu Looys entrez;
> Quant il fu riche, Guillaume n'en sot gré,"

ends the poem with its usual laconism.

There is, of course, in this story an element of rough comedy, approaching horse-play, which may not please all tastes. This element, however, is very largely present in the *chansons* (though it so happens, yet once more, that *Roland* is accidentally free from it), and it is especially obvious in the particular branch or *geste* of William with the Short Nose, appearing even in the finest and longest of the subdivisions, *Aliscans*, which some have put at the head of the whole. In fact, as we might expect, the *esprit gaulois* can seldom refrain altogether from pleasantry, and its pleasantry at this time is distinctly "the humour of the stick." But still the poem is a very fine one. Its ethical opening is really noble: the picture of the Court at Aix has grandeur, for all its touches of simplicity; the fighting is good; the marriage scene and its fatal interruption (for we hear nothing of the princess on William's second visit to Rome) give a dramatic turn: and though there is no fine writing, there is a refreshing directness. The

Comments on the Couronnement.

shortness, too (it has less than three thousand lines), is undoubtedly in its favour, for these pieces are apt to be rather too long than too short. And if the pusillanimity and *fainéantise* of Louis seem at first sight exaggerated, it must be remembered that, very awkward as was the position of a Henry III. of England in the thirteenth century, and a James III. of Scotland in the fifteenth, kings of similar character must have cut even worse figures in the tenth or eleventh, when the story was probably first elaborated, and worse still in the days of the supposed occurrence of its facts. Indeed, one of the best passages as poetry, and one of the most valuable as matter, is that in which the old king warns his trembling son how he must not only do judgment and justice, must not only avoid luxury and avarice, protect the orphan and do the widow no wrong, but must be ready at any moment to cross the water of Gironde with a hundred thousand men in order to *craventer et confondre* the pagan host, — how he must be towards his own proud vassals "like a man-eating leopard," and if any dare levy war against him, must summon his knights, besiege the traitor's castle, waste and spoil all his land, and when he is taken show him no mercy, but lop him limb from limb, burn him in fire, or drown him in the sea.[1] It is not precisely an amiable spirit, this spirit of the *chansons:* but there is this to be said in its favour, there is no mistake about it.

It may be perhaps expected that before, in the

[1] *C.L.*, ll. 72-79, 172-196.

William of Orange.

second place, summing the other branches of the saga of this William of Orange, it should be said who he was. But it is better to refer to the authorities already given on this, after all, not strictly literary point. Enormous pains have been spent on the identification or distinction of William Short-nose, Saint William of Gellona, William Tow-head of Poitiers, William Longsword of Normandy, as well as several other Williams. It may not be superfluous, and is certainly not improper, for those who undertake the elaborate editing of a particular poem to enter into such details. But for us, who are considering the literary development of Europe, it would be scarcely germane. It is enough that certain *trouvères* found in tradition, in history freely treated, or in their own imaginations, the material which they worked into this great series of poems, of which those concerning William directly amount to eighteen, while the entire *geste* of Garin de Montglane runs to twenty-four.

The earlier poems of the cycle.

For the purposes of the *chansons*, William of the Strong Arm or the Short Nose is Count, or rather Marquis, of Orange, one of Charlemagne's peers, a special bulwark of France and Christendom towards the south-east, and a man of approved valour, loyalty, and piety, but of somewhat rough manners. Also (which is for the *chanson de geste* of even greater importance) he is grandson of Garin de Montglane and the son of Aimeri de Narbonne, heroes both, and possessors of the same good qualities which extend to all the

family. For it is a cardinal point of the *chansons* that not only *bon sang chasse de race*, but evil blood likewise. And the House of Narbonne, or Montglane, or Orange, is as uniformly distinguished for loyalty as the Normans and part of the house of Mayence for "treachery." To illustrate its qualities, twenty-four *chansons*, as has been said, are devoted, six of which tell the story before William, and the remaining eighteen that of his life. The first in M. Gautier's order[1] is *Les Enfances Garin de Montglane*. Garin de Montglane, the son of Duke Savary of Aquitaine and a mother persecuted by false accusations, like so many heroines of the middle ages, fights first in Sicily, procures atonement for his mother's wrongs, and then goes to the Court of Charlemagne, who, according to the general story, is his exact equal in age, as is also Doon de Mayence, the special hero of the third great *geste*. He conquers Montglane, and marries the Lady Mabille, his marriage and its preliminaries filling the second romance, or *Garin de Montglane* proper. He has by Mabille four sons—Hernaut de Beaulande, Girart de Viane, Renier de Gennes, and Milles de Pouille. Each of the three first is the subject of an existing *chanson*, and doubtless the fourth was similarly honoured. *Girart de Viane* is one of the most striking of the *chansons* in matter. The hero quarrels with Charlemagne owing to the bad offices of the empress, and a great barons' war follows, in which Roland and Oliver have

[1] M. Jonckbloët, who takes a less wide range, begins his selection or collection of the William saga with the *Couronnement Loys*.

their famous fight, and Roland is betrothed to Oliver's sister Aude. *Hernaut de Beaulande* tells how the hero conquers Aquitaine, marries Fregonde, and becomes the father of Aimeri de Narbonne; and *Renier de Gennes* in like fashion the success of its eponym at Genoa, and his becoming the father of Oliver and Aude. Then we pass to the third generation (Charlemagne reigning all the time) with the above-named *Aimeri de Narbonne.* The events of this come after Roncesvalles, and it is on the return thence that, Narbonne being in Paynim hands, Aimeri, after others have refused, takes the adventure, the town, and his surname. He marries Hermengart, sister of the king of the Lombards, repulses the Saracens, who endeavour to recover Narbonne, and begets twelve children, of whom the future William of Orange is one. These *chansons*, with the exception of *Girart de Viane*, which was printed early, remained much longer in MS. than their successors, and the texts are not accessible in any such convenient *corpus* as Dr Jonckbloët's though some have been edited recently.

Three poems intervene between *Aimeri de Narbonne* and the *Couronnement Loys*, but they do not seem to have been always kept apart. The first, the *Enfances Guillaume*, tells how when William himself had left Narbonne for Charlemagne's Court, and his father was also absent, the Saracens under Thibaut, King of Arabia, laid siege to the town, laying at the same time siege to the heart of the beautiful Saracen Princess Orable, who lives in the enchanted palace of Gloriette at Orange, itself then, as Narbonne had been, a pagan possession.

William, going with his brothers to succour their mother, captures Baucent, a horse sent by the princess to Thibaut, and falls in love with her, his love being returned. She is forced to marry Thibaut, but preserves herself by witchcraft as a wife only in name. Orange does not fall into the hand of the Christians, though they succeed in relieving Narbonne. William meanwhile has returned to Court, and has been solemnly dubbed knight, his *enfances* then technically ceasing.

This is followed by the *Département des Enfans Aimeri*, in which William's brothers, following his example, leave Narbonne and their father for different parts of France, and achieve adventures and possessions. One of them, Bernart of Brabant, is often specially mentioned in the latter branches of the cycle as the most valiant of the clan next to Guillaume, and it is not improbable that he had a *chanson* to himself. The youngest, Guibelin, remains, and in the third *Siege of Narbonne*, which has a poem to itself, he shows prowess against the Saracens, but is taken prisoner. He is rescued from crucifixion by his aged father, who cuts his way through the Saracens and carries off his son. But the number of the heathen is too great, and the city must have surrendered if an embassy sent to Charlemagne had not brought help, headed by William himself, in time. He is as victorious as usual, but after his victory again returns to Aix.

Now begins the *Couronnement Loys*, of which the more detailed abstract given above may serve, not

merely to make the individual piece known, but to indicate the general course, incidents, language, and so forth of all these poems. It will be remembered that it ends by a declaration that the king was not grateful to the King-maker. He forgets William in the distribution of fiefs, says M. Gautier; we may say, perhaps, that he remembers rather too vividly the rough instruction he has received from his brother-in-law. On protest William receives Spain, Orange, and Nîmes, a sufficiently magnificent dotation, were it not that all three are in the power of the infidels. William, however, loses no time in putting himself in possession, and begins with Nîmes. This he carries, as told in the *Charroi de Nîmes*,[1] by the Douglas-like stratagem (indeed it is not at all impossible that the Good Lord James was acquainted with the poem) of hiding his knights in casks, supposed to contain salt and other merchandise, which are piled on cars and drawn by oxen. William himself and Bertrand his nephew conduct the caravan, dressed in rough boots (which hurt Bertrand's feet), blue hose, and coarse cloth frocks. The innocent paynims give them friendly welcome, though William is nearly discovered by his tell-tale disfigurement. A squabble, however, arises; but William, having effected his entrance, does not lose time. He blows his horn, and the knights springing from their casks, the town is taken. This *Charroi de Nîmes* is one of the most spirited, but one of the roughest, of the group. The catalogue of his services with which William

The Charroi de Nimes.

[1] Jonckbloët, i. 73-111.

overwhelms the king, each item ushered by the phrase "Rois, quar te membre" ("King, bethink thee then"), and to which the unfortunate Louis can only answer in various forms, "You are very ill-tempered" ("Pleins es de mautalent"; "Mautalent avez moult"), is curiously full of uncultivated eloquence; while his refusal to accept the heritage of Auberi le Bourgoing, and thereby wrong Auberi's little son, even though "sa marrastre Hermengant de Tori" is also offered by the generous monarch with the odd commendation—

"La meiller feme qui onc beust de vin,"

is justly praised. But when the venerable Aymon not unnaturally protests against almost the whole army accompanying William, and the wrathful peer breaks his jaw with his fist, when the peasants who grumble at their casks and their oxen being seized are hanged or have their eyes put out—then the less amiable side of the matter certainly makes its appearance.

William has thus entered on part, though the least part, of the king's gift to him—a gift which it is fair to Louis to say that the hero had himself demanded, after refusing the rather vague offer of a fourth of the lands and revenues of all France. The *Prise d'Orange*[1] follows in time and as a subject of *chanson*, the *Charroi de Nîmes*. The earlier poem had been all sheer fighting with no softer side. In this William is reminded of the beautiful Orable (wife, if only in name, of King Thibaut),

The Prise d'Orange.

[1] Jonckbloët, i. 112-162.

who lives there, though her husband, finding a wife who bewitches the nuptial chamber unsatisfactory, has left her and Orange to the care of his son Arragon. The reminder is a certain Gilbert of Vermandois who has been prisoner at Orange, and who, after some hesitation, joins William himself and his brother Guibelin in a hazardous expedition to the pagan city. They blacken themselves with ink, and are not ill received by Arragon: but a Saracen who knows the "Marquis au Court Nez" informs against him (getting his brains beaten out for his pains), and the three, forcing a way with bludgeons through the heathen, take refuge in Gloriette, receive arms from Orable, who has never ceased to love the Marquis, and drive their enemies off. But a subterranean passage (this probably shows the *chanson* to be a late one in this form) lets the heathen in: and all three champions are seized, bound, and condemned to the flames. Orable demands them, not to release but to put in her own dungeons, conveniently furnished with vipers; and for a time they think themselves betrayed. But Orable soon appears, offers them liberty if William will marry her, and discloses a second underground passage. They do not, however, fly by this, but only send Gilbert to Nîmes to fetch succour: and as Orable's conduct is revealed to Arragon, a third crisis occurs. It is happily averted, and Bertrand soon arriving with thirteen thousand men from Nîmes, the Saracens are cut to pieces and Orange won. Orable is quickly baptised, her name being changed to Guibourc, and married without further delay. William

is William of Orange at length in good earnest, and the double sacrament reconciles M. Gautier (who is constantly distressed by the forward conduct of his heroines) to Guibourc ever afterwards. It is only fair to say that in the text published by M. Jonckbloët (and M. Gautier gives references to no other) "la curtoise Orable" does not seem to deserve his hard words. There is nothing improper in her conduct, and her words do not come to much more than—

"I am your wife if you will marry me."

La Prise d'Orange ends with the couplet—

"Puis estut il tiex xxx ans en Orenge
Mes ainc un jor n'i estut sanz chalenge."

The story of Vivien.

Orange, in short, was a kind of Garde Douloureuse against the infidel: and William well earned his title of "Marchis." The story of his exploits diverges a little — a loop rather than an episode—in two specially heroic *chansons*, the *Enfances Vivien* and the *Covenant Vivien*,[1] which tell the story of one of his nephews, a story finished by Vivien's glorious death at the opening of the great *chanson* of *Aliscans*. Vivien is the son of Garin d'Ansène, one of those "children of Aimeri" who have sought fortune away from Narbonne, and one of the captives of Roncesvalles. Garin is only to be delivered at the cost of his son's life, which Vivien cheerfully offers. He is actually on the pyre, which is kindled, when the pagan hold Luiserne is stormed by a pirate king, and

[1] *Enfances Vivien*, ed. Wahlen and v. Feilitzer, Paris, 1886: *Covenant Vivien*, Jonckbloët, i. 163-213.

Vivien is rescued, but sold as a slave. An amiable paynim woman buys him and adopts him; but he is a born knight, and when grown up, with a few allies surprises Luiserne itself, and holds it till a French army arrives, and Garin recovers his son, whom he had thought dead. After these *Enfances*, promising enough, comes the *Covenant* or vow, never to retreat before the Saracens. Vivien is as savage as he is heroic; and on one occasion sends five hundred prisoners, miserably mutilated, to the great Admiral Desramé. The admiral assembles all the forces of the East as well as of Spain, and invades France. Vivien, overpowered by numbers, applies to his uncle William for help, and the battle of Aliscans is already half fought and more than half lost before the actual *chanson* of the name begins. *Aliscans*[1] itself opens with a triplet in which the "steel clash" of the *chanson* measure is more than ever in place:—

> "A icel jor ke la dolor fu grans,
> Et la bataille orible en Aliscans:
> Li quens Guillaumes i soufri grans ahans."

And it continues in the same key. The commentators declare that the story refers to an actual historical battle of Villedaigne. This may be a fact: the literary excellence of *Aliscans* is one. The scale of the battle is represented as being enormous: and the poet is not unworthy of his subject. Neither is William *impar sibi:* but his day of un-

Aliscans.

[1] Jonckbloët, i. 215 to end; separately, as noted above, by Guessard and de Montaiglon, Paris, 1870.

broken victory is over. No one can resist him personally; but the vast numbers of the Saracens make personal valour useless. Vivien, already hopelessly wounded, fights on, and receives a final blow from a giant. He is able, however, to drag himself to a tree where a fountain flows, and there makes his confession, and prays for his uncle's safety. As for William himself, his army is entirely cut to pieces, and it is only a question whether he can possibly escape. He comes to Vivien's side just as his nephew is dying, bewails him in a very noble passage, receives his last breath, and is able before it passes to administer the holy wafer which he carries with him. It is Vivien's first communion as well as his last.

After this really great scene, one of the finest in all the *chansons*, William puts the corpse of Vivien on the wounded but still generous Baucent, and endeavours to make his way through the ring of enemies who have held aloof but are determined not to let him go. Night saves him: and though he has to abandon the body, he cuts his way through a weak part of the line, gains another horse (for Baucent can carry him no longer), and just reaches Orange. But he has taken the arms as well as the horse of a pagan to get through his foes: and in this guise he is refused entrance to his own city. Guibourc herself rejects him, and only recognises her husband from the prowess which he shows against the pursuers, who soon catch him up. The gates are opened and he is saved, but Orange is surrounded by the heathen. There is no room to tell the full heroism of Guibourc, and,

besides, *Aliscans* is one of the best known of the *chansons*, and has been twice printed.

The end of the story.

From this point the general interest of the saga, which has culminated in the battle of Aliscans, though it can hardly be said to disappear, declines somewhat, and is diverted to other persons than William himself. It is decided that Guibourc shall hold Orange, while he goes to the Court of Louis to seek aid. This personal suit is necessary lest the fulness of the overthrow be not believed; and the pair part after a scene less rugged than the usual course of the *chansons*, in which Guibourc expresses her fear of the "damsels bright of blee," the ladies of high lineage that her husband will meet at Laon; and William swears in return to drink no wine, eat no flesh, kiss no mouth, sleep on his saddle-cloth, and never change his garments till he meets her again.

His reception is not cordial. Louis thinks him merely a nuisance, and the courtiers mock his poverty, distress, and loneliness. He meets with no hospitality save from a citizen. But the chance arrival of his father and mother from Narbonne prevents him from doing anything rash. They have a great train with them, and it is no longer possible simply to ignore William; but from the king downwards, there is great disinclination to grant him succour, and Queen Blanchefleur is especially hostile. William is going to cut her head off—his usual course of action when annoyed—after actually addressing her in a speech of extreme directness, somewhat resembling

Hamlet's to Gertrude, but much ruder. Their mother saves Blanchefleur, and after she has fled in terror to her chamber, the fair Aelis, her daughter, a gracious apparition, begs and obtains forgiveness from William, short of temper as of nose, but also not rancorous. Reconciliation takes place all round, and an expedition is arranged for the relief of Orange. It is successful, but chiefly owing to the prowess, not of William, but of a certain Renouart, who is the special hero, not merely of the last half of *Aliscans*, but of nearly all the later *chansons* of the *geste* of Garin de Montglane. This Renouart or Rainouart is an example, and one of the earliest, perhaps the very earliest, of the type of hero, so dear to the middle ages, who begins by service in the kitchen or elsewhere, of no very dignified character, and ends by being discovered to be of noble or royal birth. Rainouart is thus the ancestor, and perhaps the direct ancestor, of Havelok, whom he especially resembles; of Beaumains, in a hitherto untraced episode of the Arthurian story, and of others. His early feats against the Saracens, in defence of Orange first, and then when William arrives, are made with no knightly weapon, but with a *tinel*—huge bludgeon, beam, "caber"—but he afterwards turns out to be Guibourc's, or rather Orable's, own brother. There are very strong comic touches in all this part of the poem, such as the difficulty Rainouart finds in re-mounting his comrades, the seven nephews of William, because his *tinel* blows are so swashing that they simply smash horse and man—a difficulty

Renouart.

overcome by the ingenious suggestion of Bertrand that he shall hit with the small end. And these comic touches have a little disturbed those who wish to find in the pure *chanson de geste* nothing but war and religion, honour and generosity. But, as has been already hinted, this is to be over-nice. No doubt the oldest existing, or at least the oldest yet discovered, MS. of *Aliscans* is not the original, for it is rhymed, not assonanced, a practically infallible test. But there is no reason to suppose that the comic touches are all new, though they may have been a little amplified in the later version. Once more, it is false argument to evolve the idea of a *chanson* from *Roland* only, and then to insist that all *chansons* shall conform to it.

After the defeat of Desramé, and the relief of half-ruined Orange, the troubles of that city and its Count are not over. The admiral returns to the charge, and the next *chanson*, the *Bataille Loquifer*, is ranked by good judges as ancient, and describes fresh prowess of Rainouart. Then comes the *Moniage* ["Monking" of] *Rainouart*, in which the hero, like so many other heroes, takes the cowl. This, again, is followed by a series describing chiefly the reprisals in Spain and elsewhere of the Christians—*Foulques de Candie*, the *Siege de Barbastre*, the *Prise de Cordres*, and *Gilbert d'Andrenas*. And at last the whole *geste* is wound up by the *Mort Aimeri de Narbonne*, *Renier*, and the *Moniage Guillaume*, the poem which unites the profane history of the *Marquis au Court Nez* to the legend of St William of the Desert, though in a fashion sometimes

odd. M. Gautier will not allow any of these poems (except the *Bataille Loquifer* and the two *Moniages*) great age; and even if it were otherwise, and more of them were directly accessible,[1] there could be no space to say much of them here. The sketch given should be sufficient to show the general characteristics of the *chansons* as each is in itself, and also the curious and ingenious way in which their successive authors have dovetailed and pieced them together into continuous family chronicles.

Some other chansons.

If these delights can move any one, they may be found almost universally distributed about the *chansons*. Of the minor groups the most interesting and considerable are the crusading cycle, late as it is in part, and that of the Lorrainers, which is, in the main, very early. Of the former the *Chansons d'Antioche* and *de Jerusalem* are almost historical, and are pretty certainly based on the account of an actual partaker. *Antioche* in particular has few superiors in the whole hundred and more poems of the kind. *Hélias* ties this historic matter on to legend proper by introducing the story of the Knight of the Swan; while *Les Chétifs* (*The Captives*) combines history and legend very interestingly, starting as it does with a probably historical capture of certain Christians, who are then plunged in dreamland of romance for the rest of it. The concluding poems of this cycle, *Baudouin de Sebourc* and the *Bastart de Bouillon*, have been already more

[1] *Foulques de Candie* (ed. Tarbé, Reims, 1860) is the only one of this batch which I possess, or have read *in extenso*.

than once mentioned. They show, as has been said, the latest form of the *chanson*, and are almost pure fiction, though they have a sort of framework or outline in the wars in Northern Arabia, at and round the city of Jôf, whose crusading towers still, according to travellers, look down on the *hadj* route through the desert. *Garin le Loherain*, on the other hand, and its successors, are pure early feudal fighting, as is also the early, excellent, and very characteristic *Raoul de Cambrai*. These are instances, and no doubt not the only ones, of what may be called district or provincial *gestes*, applying the principles of the *chansons* generally to local quarrels and fortunes.

Of what purists call the sophisticated *chansons*, those in which general romance-motives of different kinds are embroidered on the strictly *chanson* canvas, there are probably none more interesting than the later forms of *Huon de Bordeaux* and *Ogier de Danemarche*. The former, since the fortunate reprinting of Lord Berners's version by the Early English Text Society, is open to every one, though, of course, the last vestiges of *chanson* form have departed, and those who can should read it as edited in M. Guessard's series. The still more gracious legend, in which the ferocious champion Ogier, after his early triumphs over the giant Caraheu and against the paladins of Charles, is, like Huon, brought to the loadstone rock, is then subjected to the enchantments—loving, and now not baneful—of Arthur's sister Morgane, and tears himself from fairyland to come to the rescue of France, is by far the most delightful of the attempts to

"cross" the Arthurian and Carlovingian cycles. And of this we fortunately have in English a poetical version from the great *trouvère* among the poets of our day, the late Mr William Morris. Of yet others, the often-mentioned *Voyage à Constantinoble*, with its rather unseemly *gabz* (boasting jests of the peers, which are overheard by the heathen emperor with results which seem like at one time to be awkward), is among the oldest, and is a warning against the tendency to take the presence of comic elements as a necessary evidence of late date. *Les Saisnes*, dealing with the war against the Saxons, is a little loose in its morals, but vigorous and interesting. The pleasant pair of *Aiol* and *Elie de St Gilles;* the touching history of Charlemagne's mother, *Berte aus grans Piés; Acquin*, one of the rare *chansons* dealing with Brittany (though Roland was historically count thereof); *Gérard de Roussillon*, which has more than merely philological interest; *Macaire*, already mentioned; the famous *Quatre Fils d'Aymon*, longest and most widely popular, must be added to the list, and are not all that should be added to it.

Final remarks on them.

On the whole, I must repeat that the *chansons de geste*, which as we have them are the work of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the main, form the second division in point of literary value of early mediæval literature, while they possess, in a certain "sincerity and strength," qualities not to be found even in the Arthurian story itself. Despite the ardour with which they have been philologically studied for nearly three-quarters of a

century, despite (or perhaps because of) the enthusiasm which one or two devotees have shown for their literary qualities, it does not seem to me that fair justice, or anything like it, has yet been generally done. German critics care little for literary merit, and are perhaps not often trained to appreciate it; in England the *chansons* have been strangely little read. But the most singular thing is the cold reception, slightly if at all thawed recently, which they have met in France itself. It may give serious pause to the very high estimate generally entertained of French criticism by foreigners to consider this coldness, which once reached something like positive hostility in M. Ferdinand Brunetière, the chief French literary critic of our generation. I regret to see that M. Lanson, the latest historian of French literature, has not dared to separate himself from the academic *grex*. "On ne saurait nier," he says, "que quelques uns aient eu du talent;" but he evidently feels that this generous concession is in need of guards and caveats. There is no "beauté formelle" in them, he says—no formal beauty in those magnificently sweeping *laisses*, of which the ear that has once learnt their music can no more tire thereafter than of the sound of the sea itself. The style (and if it be objected that his previous words have been directly addressed to the later *chansons* and *chanson* writers, here he expressly says that this style "est le même style que dans le *Roland*," though "moins sobre, moins plein, moins sur") has "no beauty by itself," and finally he thinks that the best thing to do is "to let nine-tenths of the *chansons* follow nine-

tenths of our tragedies." I have read many *chansons* and many tragedies; but I have never read a *chanson* that has not more poetry in it than ninety-nine French tragedies out of a hundred.

The fact is that it is precisely the *beauté formelle*, assisted as it is by the peculiar spirit of which so much has been said already, which constitutes the beauty of these poems: and that these characteristics are present, not of course in uniform measure, but certainly in the great majority of the *chansons* from *Roland* to the *Bastard*. Of course if a man sits down with a preconceived idea of an epic poem, it is more likely than not that his preconceived idea will be of something very different from a *chanson de geste*. And if, refusing to depart from his preconceived idea, and making that idea up of certain things taken from the *Iliad*, certain from the *Æneid*, certain from the *Divina Commedia*, certain from *Paradise Lost*,—if he runs over the list and says to the *chanson*, "Are you like Homer in this point? Can you match me Virgil in that?" the result will be that the *chanson* will fail to pass its examination.

But if, with some knowledge of literature in the wide sense, and some love for it, he sits down to take the *chansons* as they are, and judge them on their merits and by the law of their own poetical state, then I think he will come to a very different conclusion. He will say that their kind is a real kind, a thing by itself, something of which if it were not, nothing else in literature could precisely supply the want. And he will decide further that while the best

of them are remarkably good of their kind, few of them can be called positively bad in it. And yet again, if he has been fortunately gifted by nature with that appreciation of form which saves the critic from mere prejudice and crotchet, from mere partiality, he will, I believe, go further still, and say that while owing something to spirit, they owe most to form itself, to the form of the single-assonanced or monorhymed *tirade*, assisted as it is by the singular beauty of Old French in sound, and more particularly by the sonorous recurring phrases of the *chanson* dialect. No doubt much instruction and some amusement can be got out of these poems as to matters of fact: no doubt some passages in *Roland*, in *Aliscans*, in the *Couronnement Loys*, have a stern beauty of thought and sentiment which deserves every recognition. But these things are not all-pervading, and they can be found elsewhere: the clash and clang of the *tirade* are everywhere here, and can be found nowhere else.

CHAPTER III.

THE MATTER OF BRITAIN.

ATTRACTIONS OF THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND — DISCUSSIONS ON THEIR SOURCES—THE PERSONALITY OF ARTHUR—THE FOUR WITNESSES—THEIR TESTIMONY — THE VERSION OF GEOFFREY — ITS LACUNÆ—HOW THE LEGEND GREW—WACE—LAYAMON—THE ROMANCES PROPER — WALTER MAP — ROBERT DE BORRON — CHRESTIEN DE TROYES—PROSE OR VERSE FIRST?—A LATIN GRAAL-BOOK—THE MABINOGION — THE LEGEND ITSELF — THE STORY OF JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA — MERLIN—LANCELOT—THE LEGEND BECOMES DRAMATIC—STORIES OF GAWAIN AND OTHER KNIGHTS—SIR TRISTRAM—HIS STORY ALMOST CERTAINLY CELTIC—SIR LANCELOT—THE MINOR KNIGHTS—ARTHUR—GUINEVERE—THE GRAAL—HOW IT PERFECTS THE STORY—NATURE OF THIS PERFECTION—NO SEQUEL POSSIBLE—LATER EPISODES—THE LEGEND AS A WHOLE—THE THEORIES OF ITS ORIGIN—CELTIC—FRENCH—ENGLISH—LITERARY—THE CELTIC THEORY—THE FRENCH CLAIMS—THE THEORY OF GENERAL LITERARY GROWTH—THE ENGLISH OR ANGLO-NORMAN PRETENSIONS—ATTEMPTED HYPOTHESIS.

To English readers, and perhaps not to English readers only, the middle division of the three great romance-subjects[1] ought to be of far higher interest than the

[1] See the quotation from Jean Bodel, p. 26, note. The literature of the Arthurian question is very large; and besides the drawbacks referred to in the text, much of it is scattered in periodicals. The most useful recent things in English are Mr Nutt's *Studies on the*

Attractions of the Arthurian Legend.

others; and that not merely, even in the English case, for reasons of local patriotism. The mediæval versions of classical story, though attractive to the highest degree as evidence of the extraordinary plastic power of the period, which could transform all art to its own image and guise, and though not destitute of individual charm here and there, must always be mainly curiosities. The cycle of Charlemagne, a genuine growth and not merely an incrustation or transformation, illustrated, moreover, by particular examples of the highest merit, is exposed on the one hand to the charge of a certain monotony, and on the other to the objection that, beautiful as it is, it is dead. For centuries, except in a few deliberate literary exercises, the king *à la barbe florie* has inspired no modern singer—his *geste* is extinct. But the Legend of Arthur, the latest to take definite form of the three, has shown

Legend of the Holy Grail (London, 1888); Professor Rhys's *Arthurian Legend* (Oxford, 1891); and the extensive introduction to Dr Sommer's *Malory* (London, 1890). In French the elaborate papers on different parts which M. Gaston Paris brings out at intervals in *Romania* cannot be neglected; and M. Loth's surveys of the subject there and in the *Revue Celtique* (October 1892) are valuable. Naturally, there has been a great deal in German, the best being, perhaps, Dr Kölbing's long introduction to his reprint of *Arthour and Merlin* (Leipzig, 1890). Other books will be mentioned in subsequent notes; but a complete and impartial history of the whole subject, giving the contents, with strictly literary criticism only, of all the texts, and merely summarising theories as to origin, &c., is still wanting, and sorely wanted. Probably there is still no better, as there is certainly no more delightful, book on the matter than M. Paulin Paris's *Romans de la Table Ronde* (5 vols., Paris, 1868-77). The monograph by M. Clédat on the subject in M. Petit de Julleville's new *History* (*v. supra*, p. 23, note) is unfortunately not by any means one of the best of these studies.

by far the greatest vitality. From generation to generation it has taken new forms, inspired new poetries. The very latest of the centuries has been the most prolific in contributions of any since the end of the Middle Ages; and there is no sufficient reason why the lineage should ever stop. For while the romance of antiquity is a mere "sport," an accident of time and circumstance, the *chanson de geste*, majestic and interesting as it is, representative as it is to a certain extent of a nation and a language, has the capital defect of not being adaptable. Having little or no allegorical capacity, little "soul," so to speak, it was left by the tide of time on the shores thereof without much hope of floating and living again. The Arthurian Legend, if not from the very first, yet from the first moment when it assumed vernacular forms, lent itself to that double meaning which, though it is open to abuse, and was terribly abused in these very ages, is after all the salvation of things literary, since every age adopting the first and outer meaning can suit the second and inner to its own taste and need.

Discussions on their sources.

That the vitality of the Legend is in part, if not wholly, due to the strange crossing and blending of its sources, I at least have no doubt. To discuss these sources at all, much more to express any definite opinion on the proportions and order of their blending, is a difficult matter for any literary student, and dangerous withal; but the adventure is of course not to be wholly shirked here. The matter has, both in England and abroad, been quite recently the subject of that rather acrimonious de-

bating by which scholars in modern tongues seem to think it a point of honour to rival the scholars of a former day in the classics, though the vocabulary used is less picturesque. A great deal of this debate, too, turns on matters of sheer opinion, in regard to which language only appropriate to matters of sheer knowledge is too often used. The candid inquirer, informed that Mr, or M., or Herr So-and-so, has "proved" such and such a thing in such and such a book or dissertation, turns to the text, to find to his grievous disappointment that nothing is "proved"—but that more or less probable arguments are advanced with less or more temper against or in favour of this or that hypothesis. Even the dates of MSS., which in all such cases must be regarded as the primary data, are very rarely *data* at all, but only (to coin, or rather adapt, a much-needed term) *speculata*. And the matter is further complicated by the facts that extremely few scholars possess equal and adequate knowledge of Celtic, English, French, German, and Latin, and that the best palæographers are by no means always the best literary critics.

Where every one who has handled the subject has had to confess, or should have confessed, imperfect equipment in one or more respects, there is no shame in confessing one's own shortcomings. I cannot speak as a Celtic scholar; and I do not pretend to have examined MSS. But for a good many years I have been familiar with the printed texts and documents in Latin, English, French, and German, and I believe that I have not neglected any important modern discussions of the

subject. To have no Celtic is the less disqualification in that all the most qualified Celtic scholars themselves admit, however highly they may rate the presence of the Celtic element in spirit, that no texts of the legend in its romantic form at present existing in the Celtic tongues are really ancient. And it is understood that there is now very little left unprinted that can throw much light on the general question. I shall therefore endeavour, without entering into discussions on minor points which would be unsuitable to the book, to give what seems to me the most probable view of the case, corrected by (though not by any means adjusted in a hopeless zigzag of deference to) the various authorities, from Ritson to Professor Rhys, from Paulin Paris to M. Loth, and from San Marte to Drs Förster and Zimmer.

The first and the most important thing—a thing which has been by no means always or often done—is to keep the question of Arthur apart from the question of the Arthurian Legend.

The personality of Arthur.

That there was no such a person as Arthur in reality was at one time a not very uncommon opinion among men who could call themselves scholars, though of late it has yielded to probable if not certain arguments. The two most damaging facts are the entire silence of Bede and that of Gildas in regard to him. The silence of Bede might be accidental, and he wrote *ex hypothesi* nearly two centuries after Arthur's day. Yet his collections were extremely careful, and the neighbourhood of his own Northumbria was certainly not that in which traditions

of Arthur should have been least rife. That Gildas should say nothing is more surprising and more difficult of explanation. For putting aside altogether the positive testimony of the *Vita Gildæ*, to which we shall come presently, Gildas was, again *ex hypothesi*, a contemporary of Arthur's, and must have known all about him. If the compound of scolding and lamentation known as *De Excidio Britanniæ* is late and a forgery, we should expect it to contain some reference to the king; if it is early and genuine, it is difficult to see how such reference could possibly be omitted.

At the same time, mere silence can never establish anything but a presumption; and the presumption is in this case rebutted by far stronger probabilities on the other side. The evidence is here drawn from four main sources, which we may range in the order of their chronological bearing. First, there are the Arthurian place-names, and the traditions respecting them; secondly, the fragments of genuine early Welsh reference to Arthur; thirdly, the famous passage of Nennius, which introduces him for the first time to probably dated literature; fourthly, the curious references in the above-referred-to *Vita Gildæ* of, or attributed to, Caradoc of Lancarvan. After this last, or at a time contemporary with it, we come to the comparatively detailed account of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the beginning of the Legend proper.

The four witnesses.

To summarise this evidence as carefully but as briefly as possible, we find, in almost all parts of Britain beyond the range of the first Saxon con-

quests, but especially in West Wales, Strathclyde, and Lothian, certain place-names connecting themselves either with Arthur himself or with the early catalogue of his battles.[1] We find allusions to him in Welsh poetry which may be as old as the sixth century—allusions, it is true, of the vaguest and most meagre kind, and touching no point of his received story except his mysterious death or no-death, but fairly corroborative of his actual existence. Nennius—the much-debated Nennius, whom general opinion attributes to the ninth century, but who *may* be as early as the eighth, and cannot well be later than the tenth—gives us the catalogue of the twelve battles, and the exploits of Arthur against the Saxons, in a single paragraph containing no reference to any but military matters, and speaking of Arthur not as king but as a *dux bellorum* commanding kings, many of whom were more noble than himself.

Their testimony.

The first authority from whom we get any *personal*

[1] The late Mr Skene, with great learning and ingenuity, endeavoured in his *Four Ancient Books of Wales* to claim all or almost all these place-names for Scotland in the wide sense. This can hardly be admitted: but impartial students of the historical references and the romances together will observe the constant introduction of northern localities in the latter, and the express testimony in the former to the effect that Arthur was general of *all* the British forces. We need not rob Cornwall to pay Lothian. For the really old references in Welsh poetry see, besides Skene, Professor Rhys, *op. cit.* Gildas and Nennius (but not the *Vita Gildæ*) will be found conveniently translated, with Geoffrey himself, in a volume of Bohn's Historical Library, *Six Old English Chronicles*. The E.E.T.S. edition of *Merlin* contains a very long *excursus* by Mr Stuart-Glennie on the place-name question.

account of Arthur is Caradoc, if Caradoc it be. The biographer makes his hero St Gildas (I put minor and irrelevant discrepancies aside) contemporary with Arthur, whom he loved, and who was king of all Greater Britain. But his brother kings did not admit this sovereignty quietly, and often put him to flight. At last Arthur overthrew and slew Hoel, who was his *major natu*, and became unquestioned *rex universalis Britanniæ*, but incurred the censure of the Church for killing Hoel. From this sin Gildas himself at length absolved him. But King Melvas carried off King Arthur's queen, and it was only after a year that Arthur found her at Glastonbury and laid siege to that place. Gildas and the abbot, however, arranged matters, and the queen was given up. It is most proper to add in this place that probably at much the same time as the writings of Caradoc and of Geoffrey (*v. infra*), or at a time not very distant, William of Malmesbury and Giraldus Cambrensis give us Glastonbury traditions as to the tomb of Arthur, &c., which show that by the middle of the twelfth century such traditions were clustering thickly about the Isle of Avalon. All this time, however, it is very important to notice that there is hardly the germ, and, except in Caradoc, not even the germ, of what makes the Arthurian Legend interesting to us, even of what we call the Arthurian Legend. Although the fighting with the Saxons plays an important part in the *Merlin* branches of the story, it has extremely little to do with the local traditions, and was continually reduced in importance by the men of real

genius, especially Mapes, Chrestien, and long afterwards, Malory, who handled them. The escapade of Melvas communicates a touch rather nearer to the perfect form, but only a little nearer to it. In fact, there is hardly more in the story at this point than in hundreds of other references in early history or fiction to obscure kinglets who fought against invaders.

The version of Geoffrey.

And it is again very important to observe that, though under the hands of Geoffrey of Monmouth the story at once acquires more romantic proportions, it is still not in the least, or only in the least, the story that we know. The advance is indeed great. The wonder-working of Merlin is brought in to help the patriotism of Arthur. The story of Uther's love for Igraine at once alters the mere chronicle into a romance. Arthur, the fruit of this passion, succeeds his father, carries on victorious war at home and abroad, is crowned with magnificence at Caerleon, is challenged by and defeats the Romans, is about to pass the Alps when he hears that his nephew Mordred, left in charge of the kingdom, has assumed the crown, and that Guinevere (Guanhumara, of whom we have only heard before as "of a noble Roman family, and surpassing in beauty all the women of the island") has wickedly married him. Arthur returns, defeats Mordred at Rutupiæ (after this battle Guinevere takes the veil), and, at Winchester, drives him to the extremity of Cornwall, and there overthrows and kills him. But the renowned King Arthur himself was mortally wounded,

and "being carried thence to the Isle of Avallon to be cured of his wounds, he gave up the crown to his kinsman Constantine." And so Arthur passes out of Geoffrey's story, in obedience to one of the oldest, and certainly the most interesting, of what seem to be the genuine Welsh notices of the king—"Not wise is it to seek the grave of Arthur."

Its lacunæ.

A few people, perhaps, who read this little book will need to be told that Geoffrey attributed the new and striking facts which he sprung upon his contemporaries to a British book which Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, had brought out of Armorica: and that not the slightest trace of this most interesting and important work has ever been found. It is a thousand pities that it has not survived, inasmuch as it was not only "a very ancient book in the British tongue," but contained "a continuous story in an elegant style." However, the inquiry whether Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, did or did not belong to the ancient British family of Harris may be left to historians proper. To the specially literary historian the chief point of interest is first to notice how little, if Geoffrey really did take his book from "British" sources, those sources apparently contained of the Arthurian Legend proper as we now know it. An extension of the fighting with Saxons at home, and the addition of that with Romans abroad, the Igraine episode, or rather overture, the doubtless valuable introduction of Merlin, the treason of Mordred and Guinevere, and the retirement to Avalon — that is practically all. No Round Table; no knights (though

"Walgan, the king's nephew," is, of course, an early appearance of Gawain); none of the interesting difficulties about Arthur's succession: an entire absence of personal characteristics about Guinevere (even that peculiarity of hers which a French critic has politely described as her being "very subject to be carried off," and which already appears in Caradoc, being changed to a commonplace act of ambitious infidelity with Mordred): and, most remarkable of all, no Lancelot, and no Holy Grail.

Nevertheless Geoffrey had, as it has been the fashion to say of late years, "set the heather on fire," and perhaps in no literary instance on record did the blaze spread and heighten itself with such extraordinary speed and intensity. His book must have been written a little before the middle of the twelfth century: by the end thereof the legend was, except for the embellishments and amplifications which the Middle Age was always giving, complete.

How the Legend grew.

In the account of its probable origins and growth which follows nothing can be further from the writer's wish than to emulate the confident dogmatism of those who claim to have proved or disproved this or that fact or hypothesis. In the nature of the case proof is impossible; we cannot go further than probability. It is unfortunate that some of the disputants on this, as on other kindred subjects, have not more frequently remembered the admirable words of the greatest modern practitioner, and though he lacked some more recent information, the

shrewdest modern critic of romance itself.[1] I need only say that though I have not in the least borrowed from either, and though I make neither responsible for my views, these latter, as they are about to be stated, will be found most to resemble those of Sir Frederic Madden in England and M. Paulin Paris in France—the two critics who, coming after the age of wild guesswork and imperfect reading, and before that of a scholarship which, sometimes at least, endeavours to vindicate itself by innovation for the sake of innovation, certainly equalled, and perhaps exceeded, any others in their familiarity with the actual texts. With that familiarity, so far as MSS. go, I repeat that I do not pretend to vie. But long and diligent reading of the printed material, assisted by such critical lights as critical practice in more literatures than one or two for many years may give, has led me to the belief that when they agreed they were pretty sure to be right, and that when they differed, the authority of either was at least equal, as authority, to anything subsequent.

The known or reasonably inferred historical procession of the Legend is as follows. Before the middle of the twelfth century we have nothing that can be called a story. At almost that exact point (the subject of

[1] "Both these subjects of discussion [authorship and performance of Romances] have been the source of great controversy among antiquaries—a class of men who, be it said with their forgiveness, are apt to be both positive and polemical upon the very points which are least susceptible of proof, and least valuable, if the truth could be ascertained."—Sir Walter Scott, "Essay on Romance," *Prose Works*, vi. 154.

the dedication of the *Historia Britonum* died in 1146) Geoffrey supplies the outlines of such a story. They were at once seized upon for filling in. Before many years two well-known writers had translated Geoffrey's Latin into French, another Geoffrey, Gaimar, and Wace of Jersey. Gaimar's *Brut* (a title which in a short time became generic) has not come down to us: Wace's (written in 1155) has, and though there is, as yet, no special attention bestowed upon Arthur, the Arthurian part of the story shares the process of dilatation and amplification usual in the Middle Ages. The most important of these additions is the appearance of the Round Table.

Wace.

As Geoffrey fell into the hands of Wace, so did Wace fall into those of Layamon; but here the result is far more interesting, both for the history of the legend itself and for its connection with England. Not only did the priest of Ernley or Arley-on-Severn do the English tongue the inestimable service of introducing Arthur to it, not only did he write the most important book by far, both in size, in form, and in matter, that was written in English between the Conquest and the fourteenth century, but he added immensely to the actual legend. It is true that these additions still do not exactly give us the Arthur whom we know, for they still concern the wars with the Saxons and Romans chiefly. But if it were only that we find first[1] in Layamon the

Layamon.

[1] A caution may be necessary as to this word "first." Nearly all the dates are extremely uncertain, and it is highly probable that

introduction of "elves" at Arthur's birth, and his conveyance by them at death in a magic boat to Queen "Argante" at Avalon, it would be almost enough. But there is much more. The Uther story is enlarged, and with it the appearances of Merlin; the foundation of the Round Table receives added attention; the voluntary yielding of Guinevere, here called Wenhaver, is insisted upon, and Gawain (Walwain) and Bedivere (Beduer) make their appearance. But there is still no Lancelot, and still no Grail.

The Romances proper.

These additions, which on the one side gave the greatest part of the secular interest, on the other almost the whole of the mystical attraction, to the complete story, had, however, it seems probable, been actually added before Layamon wrote. For the date of the earlier version of his *Brut* is put by the best authorities at not earlier than 1200, and it is also, according to such authorities, almost certain that the great French romances (which contain the whole legend with the exception of part of the Tristram story, and of hitherto untraced excursions like Malory's Beaumains) had been thrown into shape. But the origin, the authorship, and the order of *Merlin* in its various forms, of the *Saint Graal* and the *Quest* for it, of *Lancelot* and the *Mort Artus*, —these things are the centre of nearly all the disputes upon the subject.

A consensus of MS. authority ascribes the best and

intermediate texts of great importance are lost, or not yet found. But Layamon gives us Wace as an authority, and this is not in Wace. See Madden's edition (London, 1847).

largest part of the *prose* romances,[1] especially those dealing with Lancelot and the later fortunes of the Graal and the Round Table company, to no less a person than the famous Englishman Walter Mapes, or Map, the author of *De Nugis Curialium*, the reputed author (*v.* chap. i.) of divers ingenious Latin poems, friend of Becket, Archdeacon of Oxford, churchman, statesman, and wit. No valid reason whatever has yet been shown for questioning this attribution, especially considering the number, antiquity, and strength of the documents by which it is attested. Map's date (1137-96) is the right one; his abilities were equal to any literary performance; his evident familiarity with things Welsh (he seems to have been a Herefordshire man) would have informed him of Welsh tradition, if there was any, and the *De Nugis Curialium* shows us in him, side by side with a satirical and humorous bent, the leaning to romance and to the marvellous which only extremely shallow people believe to be alien from humour. But it is necessary for scholarship of the kind just referred to to be always devising some new thing. Frenchmen, Germans, and Celticising partisans have grudged an Englishman the glory of the exploit; and

Walter Map.

[1] These, both Map's and Borron's (*v. infra*), with some of the verse forms connected with them, are in a very puzzling condition for study. M. Paulin Paris's book, above referred to, abstracts most of them; the actual texts, as far as published, are chiefly to be found in Hucher, *Le Saint Graal* (3 vols., Le Mans, 1875-78); in Michel's *Petit Saint Graal* (Paris, 1841); in the *Merlin* of MM. G. Paris and Ulrich (Paris, 1886). But *Lancelot* and the later parts are practically inaccessible in any modern edition.

there has been of late a tendency to deny or slight Map's claims. His deposition, however, rests upon no solid argument, and though it would be exceedingly rash, considering the levity with which the copyists in mediæval MSS. attributed authorship, to assert positively that Map wrote *Lancelot*, or the *Quest of the Saint Graal*, it may be asserted with the utmost confidence that it has not been proved that he did not.

Robert de Borron.

The other claimant for the authorship of a main part of the story—in this case the Merlin part, and the long history of the Graal from the days of Joseph of Arimathea downwards—is a much more shadowy person, a certain Robert de Borron, a knight of the north of France. Nobody has much interest in disturbing Borron's claims, though they also have been attacked; and it is only necessary to say that there is not the slightest ground for supposing that he was an ancestor of Lord Byron, as was once very gratuitously done, the time when he was first heard of happening to coincide with the popularity of that poet.

Chrestien de Troyes.

The third personage who is certainly or uncertainly connected by name with the original framework of the legend is again more substantial than Robert de Borron, though less so than Walter Map. As his surname, derived from his birthplace, indicates, Chrestien de Troyes was of Champenois extraction, thus belonging to the province which, with Normandy, contributed most to early French literature. And he seems to have been

attached not merely to the court of his native prince, the Count of Champagne, but to those of the neighbouring Walloon lordships or principalities of Flanders and Hainault. Of his considerable work (all of it done, it would seem, before the end of the twelfth century) by far the larger part is Arthurian — the immense romance of *Percevale le Gallois*,[1] much of which, however, is the work of continuators; the interesting episode of the Lancelot saga, called *Le Chevalier à la Charette; Erec et Enide*, the story known to every one from Lord Tennyson's idyll; the *Chevalier au Lyon*, a Gawain legend; and *Cligès*, which is quite on the outside of the Arthurian group. All these works are written in octosyllabic couplets, particularly light and skipping, somewhat destitute of force and grip, but full of grace and charm. Of their contents more presently.

Next to the questions of authorship and of origin in point of difficulty come two others—"Which are the older: the prose or the verse romances?" and, "Was there a Latin original of the Graal story?"

Prose or verse first?

With regard to the first, it has long been laid down as a general axiom, and it is no doubt as a rule true, that prose is always later than verse, and that in mediæval times especially the order

[1] Ed. Potvin, 6 vols., Mons, 1866-70. Dr Förster has undertaken a complete Chrestien, of which the 2d and 3d vols. are *Yvain* ("Le Chevalier au Lyon") and *Erec* (Halle, 1887-90). *Le Chevalier à la Charette* should be read in Dr Jonckbloët's invaluable parallel edition with the prose of *Lancelot* (The Hague, 1850). On this last see M. G. Paris, *Romania*, xii. 459—an admirable paper, though I do not agree with it.

is almost invariable. Verse; unrhymed and half-disrhythmed prose; prose pure and simple: that is what we find. For many reasons, however, drawn partly from the presumed age of the MSS. and partly from internal evidence, the earlier scholars who considered the Arthurian matter, especially M. Paulin Paris, came to the conclusion that here the prose romances were, if not universally, yet for the most part, the earlier. And this, though it is denied by M. Paris's equally learned son, still seems the more probable opinion. For, in the first place, by this time prose, though not in a very advanced condition, was advanced enough not to make it absolutely necessary for it to lag behind verse, as had been the case with the *chansons de geste*. And in the second place, while the prose romances are far more comprehensive than the verse, the age of the former seems to be beyond question such that there could be no need, time, or likelihood for the reduction to a general prose summary of separate verse originals, while the separate verse episodes are very easily intelligible as developed from parts of the prose original.[1]

With regard to the Latin Graal-book, the testimony

[1] The parallel edition, above referred to, of the *Chevalier à la Charette* and the corresponding prose settled this in my mind long ago; and though I have been open to unsettlement since, I have not been unsettled. The most unlucky instance of that over-positiveness to which I have referred above is M. Clédat's statement that "nous savons" that the prose romances are later than the verse. We certainly do not "know" this any more than we know the contrary. There is important authority both ways; there is fair argument both ways; but the positive evidence which alone can turn opinion into knowledge has not been produced, and probably does not exist.

of the romances themselves is formal enough as to its existence. But no trace of it has been found, and its loss, if it existed, is contrary to all probability. For *ex hypothesi* (and if we take one part of the statement we must take the rest) it was not a recent composition, but a document, whether of miraculous origin or not, of considerable age. Why it should only at this time have come to light, why it should have immediately perished, and why none of the persons who took interest enough in it to turn it into the vernacular should have transmitted his copy to posterity, are questions difficult, or rather impossible, to answer. But here, again, the wise critic will not peremptorily deny. He will say that there *may* be a Latin Graal-book, and that when that book is produced, and stands the test of examination, he will believe in it; but that until it appears he will be contented with the French originals of the end of the twelfth century. Of the characteristic and probable origins of the Graal story itself, as of those of the larger Legend of which it forms a part, it will be time enough to speak when we have first given an account of the general history as it took shape, probably before the twelfth century had closed, certainly very soon after the thirteenth had opened. For the whole Legend —even excluding the numerous ramifications into independent or semi-independent *romans d'aventures*— is not found in any single book or compilation. The most extensive, and by far the best, that of our own Malory, is very late, extremely though far from unwisely eclectic, and adjusted to the presumed

A Latin Graal-book.

demands of readers, and to the certain existence in the writer of a fine literary sense of fitness. It would be trespassing on the rights of a future contributor to say much directly of Malory; but it must be said here that in what he omits, as well as in his treatment of what he inserts, he shows nothing short of genius. Those who call him a mere, or even a bad, compiler, either have not duly considered the matter or speak unhappily.

But before we go further it may be well also to say a word on the Welsh stories, which, though now admitted to be in their present form later than the Romances, are still regarded as possible originals by some.

The Mabinogion.

It would hardly be rash to rest the question of the Celtic origin, in any but the most remote and partial sense, of the Arthurian Romances on the *Mabinogion*[1] alone. The posteriority of these as we have them need not be too much dwelt upon. We need not even lay great stress on what I believe to be a fact not likely to be disputed by good critics, that the reading of the French and the Welsh-English versions one after the other, no matter in what order they be taken, will leave something more than an impression that the French is the direct original of the Welsh, and that the Welsh, in anything at all like its present form, could not by any possibility be the original of the French. The test to which I refer is this. Let any one read, with as open a mind as he can procure,

[1] Translated by Lady Charlotte Guest, 2d ed., London, 1877.

the three Welsh-French or French-Welsh romances of *Yvain-Owain*, *Erec-Geraint*, and *Percivale-Peredur*, and then turn to those that are certainly and purely Celtic, *Kilhwch and Olwen*, *the Dream of Rhiabwy* (both of these Arthurian after a fashion, though quite apart from our Arthurian Legend), and the fourfold *Mabinogi*, which tells the adventures of Rhiannon and those of Math ap Matholwy. I cannot conceive this being done by any one without his feeling that he has passed from one world into another entirely different, —that the two classes of story simply *cannot* by any possibility be, in any more than the remotest suggestion, the work of the same people, or have been produced under the same literary covenant.

The Legend itself.

Let us now turn to the Legend itself. The story which ends in Avalon begins in Jerusalem. For though the Graal-legends are undoubtedly later additions to whatever may have been the original Arthurian saga — seeing that we find nothing of them in the early Welsh traditions, nothing in Nennius, nothing in Geoffrey, nothing even in Wace or Layamon—yet such is the skill with which the unknown or uncertain authors have worked them into the legend that the whole makes one indivisible romance. Yet (as the untaught genius of Malory instinctively perceived) when the Graal-story on the one hand, and the loves of Lancelot and Guinevere with which it is connected on the other, came in, they made comparatively otiose and uninteresting the wars with Saxons and Romans, which in the earlier Legend had occupied almost the whole room.

And accordingly these wars, which still hold a very large part of the field in the *Merlin*, drop out to some extent later. The whole cycle consists practically of five parts, each of which in almost all cases exists in divers forms, and more than one of which overlaps and is overlapped by one or more of the others. These five are *Merlin*, the *Saint-Graal*, *Lancelot*, the *Quest of the Saint-Graal*, and the *Death of Arthur*. Each of the first two pairs intertwines with the other: the last, *Mort Artus*, completes them all, and thus its title was not improperly used in later times to designate the whole Legend.

The story of Joseph of Arimathea.

The starting-point of the whole, in time and incident, is the supposed revenge of the Jews on Joseph of Arimathea for the part he has taken in the burial of our Lord. He is thrown into prison and remains there (miraculously comforted, so that the time seems to him but as a day or two) till delivered by Titus. Then he and certain more or less faithful Christians set out in charge of the Holy Graal, which has served for the Last Supper, which holds Christ's blood, and which is specially under the guardianship of Joseph's son, the Bishop "Josephes," to seek foreign lands, and a home for the Holy Vessel. After a long series of the wildest adventures, in which the personages, whose names are known rather mistily to readers of Malory only — King Evelake, Naciens, and others — appear fully, and in which many marvels take place, the company, or the holier survivors of them, are finally settled in Britain. Here the imprudence of Evelake (or Mor-

drains) causes him to receive the "dolorous stroke," from which none but his last descendant, Galahad, is to recover him fully. The most striking of all these adventures, related in various forms in other parts of the Legend, is the sojourn of Naciens on a desert island, where he is tempted of the devil; while a very great part is played throughout by the Legend of the Three Trees, which in successive ages play their part in the Fall, in the first origin of mankind according to natural birth, not creation, in the building of the Temple, and in the Passion. This later legend, a wild but very beautiful one, dominated the imagination of English mediæval writers very particularly, and is fully developed, apart from its Arthurian use, in the vast and interesting miscellany of the *Cursor Mundi*.

Merlin.

But when the Graal and its guardians have been safely established upon English soil, the connection of the legend with the older and, so to speak, historical Arthurian traditions, is effected by means of Merlin, in a manner at least ingenious if not very direct. The results of the Passion, and especially the establishment on earth of a Christian monarchy with a sort of palladium in the Saint-Graal, greatly disturb the equanimity of the infernal regions; and a council is held to devise counter-policy. It occurs apparently that as this discomfiture has come by means of the union of divine and human natures, it can be best opposed by a union of human and diabolic: and after some minor proceedings a seductive devil is despatched to play incubus to the last and chastest daughter of a *prud'homme*, who has been

driven to despair and death by previous satanic attacks. The attempt is successful in a way; but as the victim keeps her chastity of intention and mind, not only is she herself saved from the legal consequences of the matter, but her child when born is the celebrated Merlin, a being endowed with supernatural power and knowledge, and not always scrupulous in the use of them, but always on the side of the angels rather than of his paternal kinsfolk. A further and more strictly literary connection is effected by attributing the knowledge of the Graal history to his information, conveyed to his master and pupil Blaise, who writes it (as well as the earlier adventures at least of the Arthurian era proper) from Merlin's dictation or report.

For some time the various Merlin stories follow Geoffrey in recounting the adventures of the prophetic child in his youth, with King Vortigern and others. But he is soon brought (again in accordance with Geoffrey) into direct responsibility for Arthur, by his share in the wooing of Igraine. For it is to be observed that—and not in this instance only—though there is usually some excuse for him, Merlin is in these affairs more commonly occupied in making two lovers happy than in attending to the strict dictates of morality. And thenceforward till his inclusion in his enchanted prison (an affair in which it is proper to say that the earliest versions give a much more favourable account of the conduct and motives of the heroine than that which Malory adopted, and which Tennyson for purposes of poetic contrast blackened yet further) he plays the part of adviser, assistant, and good enchanter

generally to Arthur and Arthur's knights. He in some stories directly procures, and in all confirms, the seating of Arthur on his father's throne; he brings the king's nephews, Gawain and the rest, to assist their uncle, in some cases against their own fathers; he presides over the foundation of the Round Table, and brings about the marriage of Guinevere and Arthur; he assists, sometimes by actual force of arms, sometimes as head of the intelligence department, sometimes by simple gramarye, in the discomfiture not merely of the rival and rebel kinglets, but of the Saxons and Romans. As has been said, Malory later thought proper to drop the greater part of this latter business (including the interminable fights round the *Roche aux Saisnes* or Saxon rock). And he also discarded a curious episode which makes a great figure in the original *Merlin*, the tale of the "false Guinevere," a foster-sister, namesake, and counterpart of the true princess, who is nearly substituted for Guinevere herself on her bridal night, and who later usurps for a considerable time the place and rights of the queen. For it cannot be too often repeated that Arthur, not even in Malory a "blameless king" by any means, is in the earlier and original versions still less blameless, especially in the article of faithfulness to his wife.

We do not, however, in the *Merlin* group proper get any tidings of Lancelot, though Lucan, Kay, Bedivere, and others, as well as Gawain and the other sons of Lot, make their appearance, and the Arthurian court and *régime*, as we imagine it with the Round Table, is

already constituted. It is to be observed that in the earlier versions there is even a sharp rivalry between the "Round Table" proper and the "Queen's" or younger knights. But this subsides, and the whole is centred at Camelot, with the realm (until Mordred's treachery) well under control, and with a constant succession of adventures, culminating in the greatest of all, the Quest of the Graal or Sangreal itself. Although there are passages of great beauty, the excessive mysticism, the straggling conduct of the story, and the extravagant praise of virginity in and for itself, in the early Graal history, have offended some readers. In the *Merlin* proper the incompleteness, the disproportionate space given to mere kite-and-crow fighting, and the defect of love-interest, undoubtedly show themselves. Although Merlin was neither by extraction nor taste likely to emulate the almost ferocious horror of human affection entertained by Robert de Borron (if Robert de Borron it was), the authors of his history, except in the version of his own fatal passion, above referred to, have touched the subject with little grace or charm. And while the great and capital tragedies of Lancelot and Guinevere, of Tristram and Iseult, are wholly lacking, there is an equal lack of such minor things as the episodes of Lancelot and the two Elaines, of Pelleas and the Lady of the Lake, and many others. Nor is this lack compensated by the stories of the incestuous (though on neither side consciously incestuous, and on the queen's quite innocent) adventure of Arthur with his sister Margause, of the exceedingly unromantic wooing of Morgane le Fée,

and of the warlock-planned intercourse of King Ban and the mother of Lancelot.

Lancelot.

Whether it was Walter Map, or Chrestien de Troyes, or both, or neither, to whom the glory of at once completing and exalting the story is due, I at least have no pretension to decide. Whosoever did it, if he did it by himself, was a very great man indeed—a man second only to Dante among the men of the Middle Age. Even if it was done by an irregular company of men, each patching and piecing the others' efforts, the result shows a marvellous "wind of the spirit" abroad and blowing on that company. As before, the reader of Malory only, though he has nearly all the best things, has not quite all even of those, and is without a considerable number of things not quite the best, but good. The most difficult to justify of the omissions of Sir Thomas is the early history of the loves of Guinevere and Lancelot, when the knight was introduced to the queen by Galahault the haughty prince—"Galeotto," as he appears in the most universally known passage of Dante himself. Not merely that unforgettable association, but the charm and grace of the original passage, as well as the dramatic and ethical justification, so to speak, of the fatal passion which wrecked at once Lancelot's quest and Arthur's kingdom, combine to make us regret this exclusion. But Malory's genius was evidently rather an unconscious than a definitely critical one. And though the exquisite felicity of his touch in detail is established once for all by comparing his prose narratives of the Passing of Arthur and

the parting of Lancelot and the queen with the verse[1] from which he almost beyond question directly took both, he must sometimes have been bewildered by the mass of material from which he had to select, and may not always have included or excluded with equally unerring judgment.

The Legend becomes dramatic.

We have seen that in the original story of Geoffrey the treason of Mordred and the final scenes take place while Arthur is warring against the Romans, very shortly after he has established his sovereignty in the Isle of Britain. Walter, or Chrestien, or whoever it was, saw that such a waste of good romantic material could never be tolerated. The romance is never—it has not been even in the hands of its most punctilious modern practitioners—very observant of miserable *minutiæ* of chronology; and after all, it was reasonable that Arthur's successes should give him some considerable enjoyment of his kingdom. It will not do to scrutinise too narrowly, or we should have to make Arthur a very old man at his death, and Guinevere a lady too elderly to leave any excuse for her proceedings, in order to accommodate the birth of Lancelot (which happened, according to the *Merlin*, after the king came to the throne), the birth of Lancelot's son Galahad, Galahad's life till even the early age of fifteen, when knighthood was then given, the Quest of the Sangreal itself, and the subsequent breaking out of Mordred's rebellion, consequent upon the war between Lancelot and Arthur after the deaths of Agravain and Gareth.

[1] *Le Morte Arthur* (ed. Furnivall, London, 1864), l. 3400 *sqq.*

But the allowance of a golden age of comparatively quiet sovereignty, of feasts and joustings at Camelot, and Caerleon, and Carlisle, of adventures major and minor, and of the great Graal-quest, is but a moderate demand for any romancer to make. At any rate, he or they made it, and justified the demand amply by the result. The contents of the central Arthurian story thus elaborated may be divided into four parts: 1. The miscellaneous adventures of the several knights, the king himself sometimes taking share in them. 2. Those of Sir Tristram, of which more presently. 3. The Quest of the Sangreal. 4. The Death of Arthur.

Stories of Gawain and other knights.

Taking these in order, the first, which is the largest in bulk, is also, and necessarily, the most difficult to summarise in short space. It is sometimes said that the prominent figure in the earlier stories is Gawain, who is afterwards by some spite or caprice dethroned in favour of Lancelot. This is not quite exact, for the bulk of the Lancelot legends being, as has been said, anterior to the end of the twelfth century, is much older than the bulk of the Gawain romances, which, owing their origin to English, and especially to northern, patriotism, do not seem to date earlier than the thirteenth or even the fourteenth. But it is true that Gawain, as we have seen, makes an appearance, though no very elaborate one, in the most ancient forms of the legend itself, where we hear nothing of Lancelot; and also that his appearances in *Merlin* do not bear anything like the contrast (similar to that afterwards developed in the Iberian romance-cycle as between Galaor and Amadis) which other authorities

make between him and Lancelot.[1] Generally speaking, the knights are divisible into three classes. First there are the older knights, from Ulfius (who had even taken part in the expedition which cheated Igraine) and Antor, down to Bedivere, Lucan, and the most famous of this group, Sir Kay, who, alike in older and in later versions, bears the uniform character of a disagreeable person, not indeed a coward, though of prowess not equal to his attempts and needs; but a boaster, envious, spiteful, and constantly provoking by his tongue incidents in which his hands do not help him out quite sufficiently.[2] Then there is the younger and main body, of whom Lancelot and Gawain (still keeping Tristram apart) are the chiefs; and lastly the outsiders, whether the "felon" knights who are at internecine, or the mere foreigners who are in friendly, antagonism with the knights of the "Rowntabull."

Of these the chief are Sir Palomides or Palamedes (a gallant Saracen, who is Tristram's unlucky rival for the affections of Iseult, while his special task is the pursuit of the Questing Beast, a symbol of Slander), and Tristram himself.

The appearance of this last personage in the Legend is one of the most curious and interesting points in it. Although on this, as on every one of such points, the

[1] Since I wrote this passage I have learnt with pleasure that there is a good chance of the whole of the Gawain romances, English and foreign, being examined together by a very competent hand, that of Mr I. Gollancz of Christ's College, Cambridge.

[2] The Welsh passages relating to Kay seem to be older than most others.

widest diversity of opinion prevails, an impartial examination of the texts perhaps enables us to obtain some tolerably clear views on the subject—views which are helpful not merely with reference to the "Tristan-saga" itself, but with reference to the origins and character of the whole Legend.[1] There cannot, I think, be a doubt that the Tristram story originally was quite separate from that of Arthur. In the first place, Tristram has nothing whatever to do with that patriotic and national resistance to the Saxon invader which, though it died out in the later legend, was the centre, and indeed almost reached the circumference, of the earlier. In the second, except when he is directly brought to Arthur's court, all Tristram's connections are with Cornwall, Brittany, Ireland, not with that more integral and vaster part of *la bloie Bretagne* which extends from Somerset and Dorset to the Lothians. When he is borrowed abroad, it is as a Varangian at Constantinople, not in the train of Arthur fighting against Romans. Again, the religious part of the story, which is so important in the developed Arthurian Legend proper, is almost entirely absent from the Tristram-tale, and the subject which played the

Sir Tristram.

[1] Editions: the French *Tristan*, edited long ago by F. Michel, but in need of completion; the English *Sir Tristrem* in Scott's well-known issue, and re-edited (Heilbronn, 1882), with excellent taste as well as learning, by Dr Kölbing, who has also given the late Icelandic version, as well as for the Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh, 1886) by Mr George P. McNeill; Gottfried of Strasburg's German (*v.* chap. vi.), ed. Bechstein (Leipzig, 1890). *Romania*, v. xv. (1886), contains several essays on the Tristram story.

fourth part in mediæval affections and interests with love, religion, and fighting—the chase—takes in the Tristram romances the place of religion itself.

But the most interesting, though the most delicate, part of the inquiry concerns the attitude of this episode or branch to love, and the conclusion to be drawn as well from that attitude as from the local peculiarities above noticed, as to the national origin of Tristram on the one hand, and of the Arthur story on the other. It has been said that Tristram's connections with what may be roughly called Britain at large—*i.e.*, the British Islands *plus* Brittany—are, except in his visits to Arthur's court, entirely with the Celtic parts—Cornwall, Ireland, Armorica—less with Wales, which plays a strangely small part in the Arthurian romances generally. This would of itself give a fair presumption that the Tristram story is more purely, or at any rate more directly, Celtic than the rest. But it so happens that in the love of Tristram and Iseult, and the revenge and general character of Mark, there is also a suffusion of colour and tone which is distinctly Celtic. The more recent advocates for the Celtic origin of romance in general, and the Arthurian legend in particular, have relied very strongly upon the character of the love adventures in these compositions as being different from those of classical story, different from those of Frankish, Teutonic, and Scandinavian romance; but, as it seems to them, like what has been observed of the early native poetry of Wales, and still more (seeing that the indisputable texts are older) of Ireland.

His story almost certainly Celtic.

A discussion of this kind is perhaps more than any other *periculosæ plenum opus aleæ;* but it is too important to be neglected. Taking the character of the early Celtic, and especially the Irish, heroine as it is given by her champions—a process which obviates all accusations of misunderstanding that might be based on the present writer's confession that of the Celtic texts alone he has to speak at second-hand—it seems to me beyond question that both the Iseults, Iseult of Ireland and Iseult of Brittany, approach much nearer to this type than does Guinevere, or the Lady of the Lake, or the damsel Lunete, or any of Arthur's sisters, even Morgane, or, to take earlier examples, Igraine and Merlin's love. So too the peculiar spitefulness of Mark, and his singular mixture of tolerance and murderous purpose towards Tristram[1] are much more Celtic than Anglo-French: as indeed is the curious absence of religiosity before noted, which extends to Iseult as well as to Tristram. We have no trace in Mark's queen of the fact or likelihood of any such final repentance as is shown by Arthur's: and though the complete and headlong self-abandonment of Iseult is excused to some extent by the magic potion, it is of an "all-for-love-and-the-world-well-lost" kind which finds no exact parallel elsewhere in the legend. So too, whether it seem more or less amiable, the half-coquettish jealousy of Guinevere in regard to Lancelot is not Celtic: while the profligate vindictiveness at-

[1] It is fair to say that Mark, like Gawain, appears to have gone through a certain process of blackening at the hands of the late romancers; but the earliest story invited this.

tributed to her in *Sir Launfal*, and only in *Sir Launfal*, an almost undoubtedly Celtic offshoot of the Arthurian Legend, is equally alien from her character. We see Iseult planning the murder of Brengwain with equal savagery and ingratitude, and we feel that it is no libel. On the other hand, though Tristram's faithfulness is proverbial, it is an entirely different kind of faithfulness from that of Lancelot—flightier, more passionate perhaps in a way, but of a less steady passion. Lancelot would never have married Iseult the White-handed.

It is, however, quite easy to understand how, this Tristram legend existing by hypothesis already or being created at the same time, the curious centripetal and agglutinative tendency of mediæval romance should have brought it into connection with that of Arthur. The mere fact of Mark's being a vassal-king of Greater Britain would have been reason enough; but the parallel between the prowess of Lancelot and Tristram, and between their loves for the two queens, was altogether too tempting to be resisted. So Tristram makes his appearance in Arthur's court, and as a knight of the Round Table, but as not exactly at home there,—as a visitor, an "honorary member" rather than otherwise, and only an occasional partaker of the home tournaments and the adventures abroad which occupy Arthur's knights proper.

The origin of the greatest of these, of Lancelot himself, is less distinct. Since the audacious imaginativeness of the late M. de la Villemarqué, which once, I

am told, brought upon him the epithet "*Faussaire!*" uttered in full conclave of Breton antiquaries, has ceased to be taken seriously by Arthurian students, the old fancies about some Breton "Ancel" or "Ancelot" have been quietly dropped. But the Celticisers still cling fondly to the supposed possibility of derivation from King Melvas, or King Maelgon, one or other of whom does seem to have been connected, as above mentioned, by early Welsh tradition with the abduction of the queen. It is, however, evident to any reader of the *Charette* episode, whether in the original French prose and verse or in Malory, that Meleagraunce the ravisher and Lancelot the avenger cannot have the same original. I should myself suppose Lancelot to have been a directly and naturally spontaneous literary growth. The necessity of a love-interest for the Arthurian story being felt, and, according to the manner of the time, it being felt with equal strength that the lover must not be the husband, it was needful to look about for some one else. The merely business-like self-surrender to Mordred as the king *de facto*, to the "lips that were near," of Geoffrey's Guanhumara and Layamon's Wenhaver, was out of the question; and the part of Gawain as a faithful nephew was too well settled already by tradition for it to be possible to make him the lover. Perhaps the great artistic stroke in the whole Legend, and one of the greatest in all literature, is the concoction of a hero who should be not only

Sir Lancelot.

"Like Paris handsome, and like Hector brave,"

but more heroic than Paris and more interesting than Hector,—not only a "greatest knight," but at once the sinful lover of his queen and the champion who should himself all but achieve, and in the person of his son actually achieve, the sacred adventure of the Holy Graal. If, as there seems no valid reason to disbelieve, the hitting upon this idea, and the invention or adoption of Lancelot to carry it out, be the work of Walter Mapes, then Walter Mapes is one of the great novelists of the world, and one of the greatest of them. If it was some unknown person (it could hardly be Chrestien, for in Chrestien's form the Graal interest belongs to Percevale, not to Lancelot or Galahad), then the same compliment must be paid to that person unknown. Meanwhile the conception and execution of Lancelot, to whomsoever they may be due, are things most happy. Entirely free from the faultlessness which is the curse of the classical hero; his unequalled valour not seldom rewarded only by reverses; his merits redeemed from mawkishness by his one great fault, yet including all virtues that are themselves most amiable, and deformed by no vice that is actually loathsome; the soul of goodness in him always warring with his human frailty;—Sir Lancelot fully deserves the noble funeral eulogy pronounced over his grave, and felt by all the elect to be, in both senses, one of the first of all extant pieces of perfect English prose.

But the virtues which are found in Lancelot eminently are found in all but the "felon" knights, differing only in degree. It is true that the later

romances and compilations, feeling perhaps the necessity of shade, extend to all the sons of Lot and Margause, except Gareth, and to some extent Gawain, the unamiable character which Mordred enjoys throughout, and which even in the *Merlin* is found showing itself in Agravaine. But Sir Lamoracke, their victim, is almost Lancelot's equal: and the best of Lancelot's kin, especially Sir Bors, come not far behind. It is entirely untrue that, as the easy epigram has it, they all "hate their neighbour and love their neighbour's wife." On the contrary, except in the bad subjects—ranging from the mere ruffianism of Breuse-sans-Pitié to the misconduct of Meleagraunce—there is no hatred of your neighbour anywhere. It is not hatred of your neighbour to be prepared to take and give hard blows from and to him, and to forgather in faith and friendship before and after. And as to the other and more delicate point, a large majority of the knights can at worst claim the benefit of the law laid down by a very pious but indulgent mediæval writer,[1] who says that if men will only not meddle with "spouse or sib" (married women or connections within the prohibited degrees), it need be no such deadly matter.

The minor knights.

It may be desirable, as it was in reference to Charlemagne, to say a few words as to Arthur himself. In both cases there is noticeable (though less in the case of Arthur than in that of Charlemagne) the tendency *not* to make the king blameless, or a paragon of prowess: and in both cases, as we should expect, this tendency is

Arthur.

[1] *Cursor Mundi*, l. 2898.

even more noticeable in the later versions than in the earlier. This may have been partly due to the aristocratic spirit of at least idealised feudalism, which gave the king no semi-divine character, but merely a human primacy *inter pares;* partly also to the literary instinct of the Middle Ages, which had discovered that the "biggest" personage of a story is by no means that one who is most interesting. In Arthur's very first literary appearance, the Nennius passage, his personal prowess is specially dwelt upon: and in those parts of the *Merlin* group which probably represent the first step from Geoffrey to the complete legend, he slays Saxons and Romans, wrests the sword single-handed from King Ryaunce, and so forth, as valiantly as Gawain himself. It is, however, curious that at this time the writers are much less careful than at a later to represent him as faithful to Guinevere, and blameless before marriage, with the exception of the early affair with Margause. He accepts the false Guinevere and the Saxon enchantress very readily; and there is other scandal in which the complaisant Merlin as usual figures. But in the accepted Arthuriad (I do not of course speak of modern writers) this is rather kept in the background, while his prowess is also less prominent, except in a few cases, such as his great fight with his sister's lover, Sir Accolon. Even here he never becomes the complaisant wittol, which late and rather ignoble works like the *Colwold's Daunce*[1] represent him as being: and he never exhibits the slightest approach to the

[1] Printed by Hartshorne, *Ancient Metrical Tales* (London, 1829), p. 209; and Hazlitt, *Early Popular Poetry* (London, 1864), i. 38.

outbursts of almost imbecile wrath which characterise Charlemagne.

Guinevere.

Something has been said of Guinevere already. It is perhaps hard to look, as any English reader of our time must, backward through the coloured window of the greatest of the *Idylls of the King* without our thoughts of the queen being somewhat affected by it. But those who knew their Malory before the *Idylls* appeared escape that danger. Mr Morris's Guinevere in her *Defence* is perhaps a little truer than Lord Tennyson's to the original conception — indeed, much of the delightful volume in which she first appeared is pure *Extrait Arthurien*. But the Tennysonian glosses on Guinevere's character are not ill justified: though perhaps, if less magnificent, it would have been truer, both to the story and to human nature, to attribute her fall rather to the knowledge that Arthur himself was by no means immaculate than to a despairing sense of his immaculateness. The Guinevere of the original romances is the first perfectly human woman in English literature. They have ennobled her unfaithfulness to Arthur by her constancy to Lancelot, they have saved her constancy to Lancelot from being insipid by interspersing the gusts of jealousy in the matter of the two Elaines which play so great a part in the story. And it is curious that, coarse as both the manners and the speech of the Middle Ages are supposed to have been, the majority of these romances are curiously free from coarseness. The ideas might shock Ascham's prudery, but the expression is, with

the rarest exceptions, scrupulously adapted to polite society. There are one or two coarse passages in the *Merlin* and the older *Saint Graal*, and I remember others in outside branches like the *Chevalier as Deux Espées*. But though a French critic has detected something shocking in *Le Chevalier à la Charette*, it requires curious consideration to follow him.

The Graal.

The part which the Holy Graal plays in the legend generally is not the least curious or interesting feature of the whole. As has been already said more than once, it makes no figure at all in the earliest versions: and it is consistent with this, as well as with the general theory and procedure of romance, that when it does appear the development of the part played by it is conducted on two more or less independent lines, which, however, the later compilers at least do not seem to think mutually exclusive. With the usual reserves as to the impossibility of pronouncing with certainty on the exact order of the additions to this wonderful structure of legend, it may be said to be probable, on all available considerations of literary probability, that of the two versions of the Graal story—that in which Percival is the hero of the Quest, and that in which Galahad occupies that place—the former is the earlier. According to this, which commended itself especially to the French and German handlers of the story,[1] the Graal Quest lies

[1] And contrariwise the Welsh *Peredur* (*Mabinogion, ed. cit.*, 81) has only a possible allusion to the Graal story, while the English *Sir Percivale* (*Thornton Romances*, ed. Halliwell, Camden Society, 1844) omits even this.

very much outside the more intimate concerns of the Arthurian court and the realm of Britain. Indeed, in the latest and perhaps greatest of this school, Wolfram von Eschenbach (*v.* chap. vi.), the story wanders off into uttermost isles of fancy, quite remote from the proper Arthurian centres. It may perhaps be conceded that this development is in more strict accordance with what we may suppose and can partly perceive to have been the original and almost purely mystical conception of the Graal as entertained by Robert de Borron, or another—the conception in which all earthly, even wedded, love is of the nature of sin, and according to which the perfect knight is only an armed monk, converting the heathen and resisting the temptations of the devil, the world, and more particularly the flesh; diversifying his wars and preachings only or mainly by long mystical visions of sacred history as it presented itself to mediæval imagination. It is true that the genius of Wolfram has not a little coloured and warmed this chilly ideal: but the story is still conducted rather afar from general human interest, and very far off indeed from the special interests of Arthur.

How it perfects the story.

Another genius, that of Walter Map (by hypothesis, as before), described and worked out different capabilities in the story. By the idea, simple, like most ideas of genius, of making Lancelot, the father, at once the greatest knight of the Arimathean lineage, and unable perfectly to achieve the Quest by reason of his sin, and Galahad the son, inheritor of his prowess but not of his weakness, he has

at once secured the success of the Quest in sufficient accordance with the original idea and the presence of abundant purely romantic interest as well. And at the same time by connecting the sin which disqualifies Lancelot with the catastrophe of Arthur, and the achieving of the Quest itself with the weakening and breaking up of the Round Table (an idea insisted upon no doubt, by Tennyson, but existent in the originals), a dramatic and romantic completeness has been given to the whole cycle which no other collection of mediæval romances possesses, and which equals, if it does not exceed, that of any of the far more apparently regular epics of literary history. It appears, indeed, to have been left for Malory to adjust and bring out the full epic completeness of the legend: but the materials, as it was almost superfluous for Dr Sommer to show by chapter and verse, were all ready to his hand. And if (as that learned if not invariably judicious scholar thinks) there is or once was somewhere a *Suite* of Lancelot corresponding to the *Suite de Merlin* of which Sir Thomas made such good use, it is not improbable that we should find the adjustment, though not the expression, to some extent anticipated.

Nature of this perfection.

At any rate, the idea is already to hand in the original romances of our present period; and a wonderfully great and perfect idea it is. Not the much and justly praised arrangement and poetical justice of the Oresteia or of the story of Œdipus excel the Arthuriad in what used to be called "propriety" (which has nothing to do with prudishness), while both are, as at least it seems to me, far inferior

in varied and poignant interest. That the attainment of the Graal, the healing of the maimed king, and the fulfilling of the other "weirds" which have lain upon the race of Joseph, should practically coincide with the termination of that glorious reign, with which fate and metaphysical aid had connected them, is one felicity. The "dolorous death and departing out of this world" in Lyonnesse and elsewhere corresponds to and completes the triumph of Sarras. From yet another point of view, the bringing into judgment of all the characters and their deeds is equally complete, equally natural and unforced. It is astonishing that men like Ascham,[1] unless blinded by a survival of mediæval or a foreshadowing of Puritan prudery, should have failed to see that the morality of the *Morte d'Arthur* is as rigorous as it is unsqueamish. Guinevere in her cloister and Lancelot in his hermitage, Arthur falling by (or at any rate in battle against) the fruit of his incestuous intercourse—these are not exactly encouragements to vice: while at the same time the earlier history may be admitted to have nothing of a crabbed and jejune virtue.

But this conclusion, with the minor events which lead up to it, is scarcely less remarkable as exhibiting in the original author, whoever he was, a sense of art, a sense of finality, the absence of which is the great blot on Romance at large, owing to the natural, the human, but the very inartistic, craving for sequels. As is well known, it was the most difficult thing in the

[1] This curious outburst, referred to before, may be found in the *Schoolmaster*, ed. Arber, p. 80, or ed. Giles, *Works of Ascham*, iii. 159.

world for a mediæval romancer to let his subject go. He must needs take it up from generation to generation; and the interminable series of Amadis and Esplandian stories, which, as the last example, looks almost like a designed caricature, is only an exaggeration of the habit which we can trace back through *Huon of Bordeaux* and *Guy of Warwick* almost to the earliest *chansons de geste.*

No sequel possible.

But the intelligent genius who shaped the Arthuriad has escaped this danger, and that not merely by the simple process which Dryden, with his placid irony, somewhere describes as "leaving scarce three of the characters alive." We have reached, and feel that we have reached, the conclusion of the whole matter when the Graal has been taken to Heaven, and Arthur has gone to Avalon. Nobody wants to hear anything of the doubtless excellent Duke and King Constantine. Sir Ector himself could not leave the stage with more grace than with his great discourse on his dead comrade and kinsman. Lancelot's only son has gone with the Graal. The end is not violent or factitious, it is necessary and inevitable. It were even less unwise to seek the grave of Arthur than to attempt to take up the story of the Arthurians after king and queen and Lancelot are gone each to his and her own place, after the Graal is attained, after the Round Table is dissolved.

It is creditable to the intelligence and taste of the average mediæval romance-writer that even he did not yield to his besetting sin in this particular instance. With the exception of *Ysaie le Triste*, which deals with

the fortunes of a supposed son of Tristan and Yseult, and thus connects itself with the most outlying part of the legend—a part which, as has been shown, is only hinged on to it—I cannot remember a single romance which purports to deal with affairs subsequent to the battle in Lyonesse. The two latest that can be in any way regarded as Arthurian, *Arthur of Little Britain* and *Cleriodus*, avowedly take up the story long subsequently, and only claim for their heroes the glory of distant descent from Arthur and his heroes. *Meliadus de Lyonnois* ascends from Tristram, and endeavours to connect the matter of Britain with that of France. *Giron le Courtois* deals with Palamedes and the earlier Arthurian story; while *Perceforest*, though based on the *Brut*, selects periods anterior to Arthur.[1]

Later episodes.

There was, however, no such artistic constraint as regards episodes of the main story, or *romans d'aventures* celebrating the exploits of single knights, and connected with that story by a sort of stock overture and *dénoûment*, in the first of which an adventure is usually started at Arthur's court, while the successful knight is also accustomed to send his captives to give testimony to his prowess

[1] I have a much less direct acquaintance with the romances mentioned in this paragraph than with most of the works referred to in this book. I am obliged to speak of them at second-hand (chiefly from Dunlop and Mr Ward's invaluable *Catalogue of Romances*, vol. i. 1883; vol. ii. 1893). It is one of the results of the unlucky fancy of scholars for re-editing already accessible texts instead of devoting themselves to *anecdota*, that work of the first interest, like *Perceforest*, for instance, is left to black-letter, which, not to mention its costliness, is impossible to weak eyes; even where it is not left to manuscript, which is more impossible still.

in the same place. As has been said above,[1] there is a whole cluster of such episodes—most, it would seem, owing their origin to England or Scotland — which have Sir Gawain for their chief hero, and which, at least in such forms as survive, would appear to be later than the great central romances which have been just noticed. Some of these are of much local interest—there being a Scottish group, a group which seems to centre about Cumbria, and so forth—but they fall rather to the portion of my successor in this series, who will take as his province *Gawaine and the Green Knight*, *Lancelot of the Laik*, the quaint alliterative Thornton *Morte Arthur*, and not a few others. The most interesting of all is that hitherto untraced romance of Beaumains or Gareth (he, as Gawain's brother, brings the thing into the class referred to), of which Malory has made an entire book, and which is one of the most completely and perfectly turned-out episodes existing. It has points in common with *Yvain*,[2] and others in common with *Ipomydon*,[3] but at the same time quite enough of its own. But we have no French text for it. On the other hand, we have long verse romances like *Durmart le Gallois*[4] (which both from the title and from certain mystical Graal passages rather connects itself with the Percevale sub-section); and the *Chevalier as Deux Espées*,[5] which belongs to the Gawain class. But all these, as well as the German romances to be noticed in chap. vi.,

[1] See pp. 114, 115 note. [2] See above, p. 102.
[3] Ed. Weber, *Metrical Romances*, Edinburgh, 1810, ii. 279.
[4] Ed. Stengel. Tübingen, 1873. [5] Ed. Förster. Halle, 1877.

distinguish themselves from the main stories analysed above not merely by their obvious and almost avowed dependence, but by a family likeness in incident, turn, and phrase from which those main stories are free. In fact the general fault of the *Romans d'Aventures* is that neither the unsophisticated freshness of the *chanson de geste*, nor the variety and commanding breadth of the Arthurian legend, appears in them to the full. The kind of "balaam," the stock repetitions and expletives at which Chaucer laughs in "Sir Thopas"—a laugh which has been rather unjustly received as condemning the whole class of English romances—is very evident even in the French texts. We have left the great and gracious ways, the inspiring central ideas, of the larger romance.

The Legend as a whole.

It may perhaps seem to some readers that too much praise has been given to that romance itself, far as we are, not merely from Ascham's days, but from those in which the excellent Dunlop was bound to confess that "they [the romances of the Round Table] will be found extremly defective in those points which have been laid down as constituting excellence in fictitious narrative," that they are "improbable," full of "glaring anachronisms and geographical blunders," "not well shaded and distinguished in character," possessing heroines such as "the mistresses of Tristan and Lancelot" [may God assoil Dunlop!] who are "women of abandoned character," "highly reprehensible in their moral tendency," "equalled by the most insipid romance of the present day as a fund of amusement." In those days even

Scott thought it prudent to limit his praise of Malory's book to the statement that "it is written in pure old English, and many of the wild adventures which it contains are told with a simplicity bordering on the sublime." Of Malory—thanks to the charms of his own book in the editions of Southey, of the two editors in 12mo, of Wright and of Sir Edward Strachey, not to mention the recent and stately issues given by Dr Sommer and Professor Rhys—a better idea has long prevailed, though there are some gainsayers. But of the originals, and of the Legend as a whole, the knowledge is too much limited to those who see in that legend only an opportunity for discussing texts and dates, origins and national claims. Its extraordinary beauty, and the genius which at some time or other, in one brain or in many, developed it from the extremely meagre materials which are all that can be certainly traced, too often escape attention altogether, and have hardly, I think, in a single instance obtained full recognition.

The theories of its origin.

Yet however exaggerated the attention to the *Quellen* may have been, however inadequate the attention to the actual literary result, it would be a failure in duty towards the reader, and disrespectful to those scholars who, if not always in the most excellent way, have contributed vastly to our knowledge of the subject, to finish this chapter without giving something on the question of origins itself. I shall therefore conclude it with a brief sketch of the chief opinions on the subject, and with

an indication of those to which many years' reading have inclined myself.

The theories, not to give them one by one as set forth by individual writers, are in the main as follows:—

Celtic. I. That the Legend is, not merely in its first inception, but in main bulk, Celtic, either (*a*) Welsh or (*b*) Armorican.

French. II. That it is, except in the mere names and the vaguest outline, French.

English. III. That it is English, or at least Anglo-Norman.

Literary. IV. That it is very mainly a "literary" growth, owing something to the Greek romances, and not to be regarded without error as a new development unconnected, or almost unconnected, with traditional sources of any kind.

The Celtic theory. The first explanation is the oldest. After being for nearly half a century discredited, it has again found ardent defenders, and it may seem at first sight to be the most natural and reasonable. Arthur, if he existed at all, was undoubtedly a British hero; the British Celts, especially the Welsh, possess beyond all question strong literary affinities and a great literary performance, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, the father of the whole story, expressly declares that he took it from a book written in the British tongue. It was natural that in comparatively uncritical ages no quarrel should be made with this account. There were, even up to the last century, I believe, enthusiastic antiquaries who affirmed, and

perhaps believed, that they had come across the very documents to which Geoffrey refers, or at worst later Welsh transcripts of them. But when the study of the matter grew, and especially when Welsh literature itself began to be critically examined, uncomfortable doubts began to arise. It was found impossible to assign to the existing Welsh romances on the subject, such as those published in the *Mabinogion*, a date even approaching in antiquity that which can certainly be claimed by the oldest French texts: and in more than one case the Welsh bore unmistakable indications of having been directly imitated from the French itself. Further, in undoubtedly old Welsh literature, though there were (*v. supra*) references to Arthur, they were few, they were very meagre, and except as regards the mystery of his final disappearance rather than death, they had little if anything to do with the received Arthurian story. On the other hand, as far as Brittany was concerned, after a period of confident assertion, and of attempts, in at least doubtful honesty, to supply what could not be found, it had to be acknowledged that Brittany could supply no ancient texts whatever, and hardly any ancient tradition. These facts, when once established (and they have never since been denied by competent criticism), staggered the Celtic claim very seriously. Of late years, however, it has found advocates (who, as usual, adopt arguments rather mutually destructive than mutually confirmatory) both in France (M. Gaston Paris) and in Germany (Herr Zimmer), while it has been passionately defended in England by Mr Nutt, and with a

more cautious, but perhaps at least equally firm, support by Professor Rhys. As has been said, these Neo-Celticists do not, when they are wise, attempt to revive the older form of the claims. They rest theirs on the scattered references in undoubtedly old Welsh literature above referred to, on the place-names which play such an undoubtedly remarkable part in the local nomenclature of the West-Welsh border in the south-west of England and in Cornwall, of Wales less frequently, of Strathclyde and Lothian eminently, and not at all, or hardly at all, of that portion of England which was early and thoroughly subjected to Saxon and Angle sway. And the bolder of them, taking advantage of the admitted superiority in age of Irish to Welsh literature as far as texts go, have had recourse to this, not for direct originals (it is admitted that there are none, even of parts of the Legend such as those relating to Tristram and Iseult, which are not only avowedly Irish in place but Irish in tone), but for evidences of differential origin in comparison with classical and Teutonic literature. Unfortunately this last point is one not of technical "scholarship," but of general literary criticism, and it is certain that the Celticists have not converted all or most students in that subject to their view. I should myself give my opinion, for whatever it may be worth, to the effect that the tone and tendency of the Celtic, and especially the Irish, literature of very early days, as declared by its own modern champions, are quite different from those of the romances in general and the Arthurian Legend in particular. Again, though the other two

classes of evidence cannot be so ruled out of court as a whole, it must be evident that they go but a very little way, and are asked to go much further. If any one will consult Professor Rhys's careful though most friendly abstract of the testimony of early Welsh literature, he will see how very great the interval is. When we are asked to accept a magic caldron which fed people at discretion as the special original of the Holy Grail, the experienced critic knows the state of the case pretty well.[1] While as to the place-names, though they give undoubted and valuable support of a kind to the historical existence of Arthur, and support still more valuable to the theory of the early and wide distribution of legends respecting him, it is noticeable that they have hardly anything to do with *our* Arthurian Legend at all. They concern—as indeed we should expect—the fights with the Saxons, and some of them reflect (very vaguely and thinly) a tradition of conjugal difficulties between Arthur and his queen. But unfortunately these last are not confined to Arthurian experience; and, as we have seen, Arthur's fights with the Saxons, except the last when they joined Mordred, are of ever-dwindling importance for the Romance.

The French claims.

Like the Celtic theory, the French has an engaging appearance of justice and probability, and it has over the Celtic the overwhelming advantage as regards texts. That all, without exception,

[1] For these magical provisions of food are commonplaces of general popular belief, and, as readers of Major Wingate's book on the Soudan will remember, it was within the last few years an article of faith there that one of the original Mahdi's rivals had a magic tent which would supply rations for an army.

of the oldest texts in which the complete romantic story of Arthur appears are in the French language is a fact entirely indisputable, and at first blench conclusive. We may even put it more strongly still and say that, taking positive evidence as apart from mere assertion (as in the case of the Latin Graal-book), there is nothing to show that any part of the full romantic story of Arthur, as distinguished from the meagre quasi-historical outline of Geoffrey, ever appeared in any language before it appeared in French. The most certain of the three personal claimants for the origination of these early texts, Chrestien de Troyes, was undoubtedly a Frenchman in the wide sense; so (if he existed) was Robert de Borron, another of them. The very phrase so familiar to readers of Malory, "the French book," comes to the assistance of the claim.

And yet, as is the case with some other claims which look irresistible at first sight, the strength of this shrinks and dwindles remarkably when it comes to be examined. One consideration is by itself sufficient, not indeed totally to destroy it, but to make a terrible abatement in its cogency; and this is, that if the great Arthurian romances, written between the middle and end of the twelfth century, were written in French, it was chiefly because they could not have been written in any other tongue. Not only was no other language generally intelligible to that public of knights and ladies to which they were addressed; not only was no other vernacular language generally known to European men of letters, but no such vernacular, except Provençal, had attained to anything

like the perfection necessary to make it a convenient vehicle. Whatever the nationality of the writer or writers, it was more likely that he or they would write in French than in any other language. And as a matter of fact we see that the third of the great national claimants was an Englishman, while it is not certain that Robert de Borron was not an English subject. Nor is it yet formally determined whether Chrestien himself, in those parts of his work which are specially Arthurian, had not Map or some one else before him as an authority.

The theory of general literary growth.

The last theory, that the Legend may be almost if not quite sufficiently accounted for as a legitimate descendant of previous literature, classical and other (including Oriental sources), has been the least general favourite. As originally started, or at least introduced into English literary history, by Warton, it suffered rather unfairly from some defects of its author. Warton's *History of English Poetry* marks, and to some extent helped to produce, an immense change for the better in the study of English literature: and he deserved the contemptuous remarks of some later critics as little as he did the savage attacks of the half-lunatic Ritson. But he was rather indolent; his knowledge, though wide, was very desultory and full of scraps and gaps; and, like others in his century, he was much too fond of hypothesis without hypostasis, of supposition without substance. He was very excusably but very unluckily ignorant of what may be called the comparative panorama of English and European literature during the Middle Ages,

and was apt to assign to direct borrowing or imitation those fresh workings up of the eternal *données* of all literary art which presented themselves. As the theory has been more recently presented with far exacter learning and greater judgment by his successor, Mr Courthope,[1] it is much relieved from most of its disabilities. I have myself no doubt that the Greek romances (see chap. ix.) *do* represent at the least a stage directly connecting classical with romantic literature; and that the later of them (which, it must be remembered, were composed in this very twelfth century, and must have come under the notice of the crusaders), *may* have exercised a direct effect upon mediæval Romance proper. I formed this opinion more than twenty years ago, when I first read *Hysminias and Hysmine;* and I have never seen reason to change it since. But these influences, though not to be left out of the question, are perhaps in one respect too general, and in another too partial, to explain the precise matter. That the Arthurian Romances, in common with all the romances, and with mediæval literature generally, were much more influenced by the traditional classical culture than used at one time to be thought, I have believed ever since I began to study the subject, and am more and more convinced of it. The classics both of Europe and the East played a part, and no small part, in bringing about the new literature; but it was only a part.

[1] In his *History of English Poetry*, vol. i., London, 1895, and in a subsequent controversy with Mr Nutt, which was carried on in the *Athenæum*.

If, as I think may fairly be done, the glory of the Legend be chiefly claimed for none of these, but for English or Anglo-Norman, it can be done in no spirit of national *pleonexia*, but on a sober consideration of all the facts of the case, and allowing all other claimants their fair share in the matter as subsidiaries. From the merely *a priori* point of view the claims of England—that is to say, the Anglo-Norman realm—are strong. The matter is "the matter of Britain," and it was as natural that Arthur should be sung in Britain as that Charlemagne should be celebrated in France. But this could weigh nothing against positive balance of argument from the facts on the other side. The balance, however, does not lie against us. The personal claim of Walter Map, even if disproved, would not carry the English claim with it in its fall. But it has never been disproved. The positive, the repeated, attribution of the MSS. may not be final, but requires a very serious body of counter-argument to upset it. And there is none such. The time suits; the man's general ability is not denied; his familiarity with Welshmen and Welsh tradition as a Herefordshire Marcher is pretty certain; and his one indisputable book of general literature, the *De Nugis Curialium*, exhibits many—perhaps all—of the qualifications required: a sharp judgment united with a distinct predilection for the marvellous, an unquestionable piety combined with man-of-the-worldliness, and a toleration of human infirmities. It is hardly necessary to point out the critical incompetence of those who

The English or Anglo-Norman pretensions.

say that a satirist like Map could not have written the *Quest* and the *Mort*. Such critics would make two Peacocks as the simultaneous authors of *Nightmare Abbey* and *Rhododaphne*—nay, two Shakespeares to father the *Sonnets* and the *Merry Wives*. If any one will turn to the stories of Gerbert and Meridiana, of Galo, Sadius, and the evil queen in the *Nugæ*, he will, making allowance for Walter's awkward Latin in comparison with the exquisite French of the twelfth century, find reasons for thinking the author of that odd book quite equal to the authorship of part—not necessarily the whole—of the Arthurian story in its co-ordinated form.

Again, it is distinctly noticeable that the farther the story goes from England and the English Continental possessions, the more does it lose of that peculiar blended character, that mixture of the purely mystical and purely romantic, of sacred and profane, which has been noted as characteristic of its perfect bloom. In the *Percevale* of Chrestien and his continuators, and still more in Wolfram von Eschenbach, as it proceeds eastwards, and into more and more purely Teutonic regions, it absorbs itself in the *Graal* and the moonshiny mysticism thereto appertaining. When it has fared southwards to Italy, the lawlessness of the loves of Guinevere and Iseult preoccupies Southern attention. As for Welsh, it is sufficient to quote the statement of the most competent of Welsh authorities, Professor Rhys, to the effect that "the passion of Lancelot for Guinevere is unknown to Welsh literature." Now, as I have tried to point

out, the passion of Lancelot for Guinevere, blended as it is with the quasi-historic interest of Arthur's conquests and the religious-mystical interest of the Graal story, is the heart, the life, the source of all charm and beauty in the perfect Arthur-story.

I should think, therefore, that the most reasonable account of the whole matter may be somewhat as follows, using imagination as little as possible, and limiting hypothesis rigidly to what is necessary to connect, explain, and render generally intelligible the historical facts which have been already summarised. And I may add that while this account is not very different from the views of the earliest of really learned modern authorities, Sir Frederic Madden and M. Paulin Paris, I was surprised to find how much it agrees with that of one of the very latest, M. Loth.

Attempted hypothesis.

In so far as the probable personality and exploits, and the almost certain tradition of such exploits and such a personality, goes, there is no reason for, and much reason against, denying a Celtic origin to this Legend of Arthur. The best authorities have differed as to the amount of really ancient testimony in Welsh as to him, and it seems to be agreed by the best authorities that there is no ancient tradition in any other branch of Celtic literature. But if we take the mentions allowed as ancient by such a careful critic as Professor Rhys, if we combine them with the place-name evidence, and if we add the really important fact, that of the earliest literary dealers, certain or probable, with the legend, Geoffrey, Layamon, and Walter Map were

neighbours of Wales, and Wace a neighbour of Brittany, to suppose that Arthur as a subject for romantic treatment was a figment of some non-Celtic brain, Saxon or Norman, French or English, is not only gratuitous but excessively unreasonable. Again, there can be no reasonable doubt that the Merlin legends, in at least their inception, were Celtic likewise. The attempt once made to identify Merlin with the well-known "Marcolf," who serves as Solomon's interlocutor in a mass of early literature more or less Eastern in origin, is one of those critical freaks which betray an utterly uncritical temperament. Yet further, I should be inclined to allow no small portion of Celtic ingredient in the spirit, the tendency, the essence of the Arthurian Legend. We want something to account for this, which is not Saxon, not Norman, not French, not Teutonic generally, not Latin, not Eastern; and I at least am unable to discover where this something comes from if it is not from the Celtic fringe of England and of Normandy.

But when we come to the Legend proper, and to its most important and most interesting characteristics, to its working up, to that extraordinary development which in a bare half-century (and half a century, though a long time now, was a very short one seven hundred years ago) evolved almost a whole library of romance from the scanty *faits et gestes* of Arthur as given by Geoffrey,—then I must confess that I can see no evidence of Celtic forces or sources having

played any great part in the matter. If Caradoc of Lancarvan wrote the *Vita Gildæ* — and it is pretty certainly not later than his day, while if it was not written by him it must have been written by some one equally well acquainted with traditions, British and Armorican, of St Gildas—if he or any one else gave us what he has given about Arthur and Gildas himself, about Arthur's wife and Melvas, and if traditions existed of Galahad or even Percivale and the Graal, of the Round Table, most of all of Lancelot,—why in the name of all that is critical and probable did he not give us more? His hero could not have been ignorant of the matter, the legends of his hero could hardly have been silent about them. It is hard to believe that anybody can read the famous conclusion of Geoffrey's history without seeing a deliberate impishness in it, without being certain that the tale of the Book and the Archdeacon is a tale of a Cock and a Bull. But if it be taken seriously, how could the "British book" have failed to contain something more like our Legend of Arthur than Geoffrey has given us, and how, if it existed and gave more, could Geoffrey have failed to impart it? Why should the Welsh, the proudest in their way of all peoples, and not the least gifted in literature, when they came to give Arthurian legends of the kind which we recognise, either translate them from the French or at least adapt and adjust them thereto?

On the other hand, the supposition that the fashioning, partly out of vague tradition, partly it may be

out of more definite Celtic tales like that of Tristram, partly from classical, Eastern, and other sources, belongs to the English in the wide sense—that is to say, the nation or nations partly under English rule proper, partly under Scottish, partly under that of the feudatories or allies of the English kings as Dukes of Normandy—has to support it not merely the arguments stated above as to the concentration of the legend proper between Troyes and Herefordshire, between Broceliande and Northumbria, as to MS. authority, as to the inveteracy of the legend in English,—not only those negative ones as to the certainty that if it were written by Englishmen it would be written in French,—but another, which to the comparative student of literary history may seem strongest of all.

Here first, here eminently, and here just at the time when we should expect it, do we see that strange faculty for exhibiting a blend, a union, a cross of characteristics diverse in themselves, and giving when blended a result different from any of the parts, which is more than anything else the characteristic of the English language, of English literature, of English politics, of everything that is English. Classical rhetoric, French gallantry, Saxon religiosity and intense realisation of the other world, Oriental extravagance to some extent, the "Celtic vague"—all these things are there. But they are all co-ordinated, dominated, fashioned anew by some thing which is none of them, but which is the English genius, that curious,

anomalous, many-sided genius, which to those who look at only one side of it seems insular, provincial, limited, and which yet has given us Shakespeare, the one writer of the world to whom the world allows an absolute universality.

CHAPTER IV.

ANTIQUITY IN ROMANCE.

ODDITY OF THE CLASSICAL ROMANCE — ITS IMPORTANCE — THE TROY STORY — THE ALEXANDREID — CALLISTHENES — LATIN VERSIONS — THEIR STORY — ITS DEVELOPMENTS — ALBERIC OF BESANÇON — THE DECASYLLABIC POEM — THE GREAT "ROMAN D'ALIXANDRE" — FORM, ETC. — CONTINUATIONS — "KING ALEXANDER" — CHARACTERISTICS — THE TALE OF TROY — DICTYS AND DARES — THE DARES STORY — ITS ABSURDITY — ITS CAPABILITIES — TROILUS AND BRISEIDA — THE 'ROMAN DE TROIE' — THE PHASES OF CRESSID — THE 'HISTORIA TROJANA' — MEANING OF THE CLASSICAL ROMANCE.

As the interest of Jean Bodel's first two divisions[1] differs strikingly, and yet represents, in each case intimately and indispensably, certain sides of the mediæval character, so also does that of his third. This has perhaps more purely an interest of curiosity than either of the others. It neither constitutes a capital division of general literature like the Arthurian story, nor embodies and preserves a single long-past phase in national spirit and character, like the *chansons de geste*. From certain standpoints of the drier and more rigid criticism it is

Oddity of the Classical Romance.

[1] See note 2, p. 26.

exposed to the charge of being trifling, almost puerile. We cannot understand—or, to speak with extremer correctness, it would seem that some of us cannot understand—the frame of mind which puts Dictys and Dares on the one hand, Homer on the other, as authorities to be weighed on equal terms, and gravely sets Homer aside as a very inferior and prejudiced person; which, even after taking its Dictys and Dares, proceeds to supplement them with entire inventions of its own; which, after in the same way taking the Pseudo-Callisthenes as the authoritative biographer of Alexander, elaborates the legend with a wild luxuriance that makes the treatment of the Tale of Troy seem positively modest and sober; which makes Thebes, Julius Cæsar, anything and anybody in fabulous and historical antiquity alike, the centre, or at least the nucleus, of successive accretions of romantic fiction.

Its importance—the Troy story.

Nevertheless, the attractions, intrinsic and extrinsic, of the division are neither few nor small. This very confusion, as it seems nowadays, this extraordinary and almost monstrous blending of uncritical history and unbridled romance, shows one of the most characteristic sides of the whole matter, and exhibits, as do few other things, that condition of mediæval thought in regard to all critical questions which has so constantly to be insisted on. As in the case of the Arthurian story, the matter thus presented caught hold of the mediæval imagination with a remarkable grip, and some of the most interesting literary successions of all history date from it. Among them it is almost enough to mention the chain of names—Benoît

de Sainte-More, Guido Colonna, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Henryson—which reaches Shakespeare, and does not cease with him, all successively elaborating the history of Troilus and Cressida. The lively story, first formed, like so many others, by the French genius, and well, if rather impudently, copied by Colonna; Boccaccio's vivid Italian Cressida; Chaucer's inimitable Pandarus, the first pleasing example of the English talent for humorous portrayal in fiction; the wonderful passage, culminating in a more wonderful single line,[1] of that Dunfermline schoolmaster whom some inconceivable person has declared to be only a poet to "Scotch patriotism"; the great gnomic verses of Shakespeare's Ulysses, and the various, unequal, sometimes almost repulsive, never otherwise than powerful, pageantry of that play, which has been perhaps more misjudged than any other of Shakespeare's,—all these spring from the Tale of Troy, not in the least as handed down by the ancients, but tricked and frounced as the Middle Age

[1] "Than upon him scho kest up baith her ene,
And with ane blunk it came in to his thocht,
That he sumtyme hir face before had sene.
. . . . . .
Ane sparke of lufe than till his hart culd spring,
And kendlit all his bodie in ane fyre
With heit fevir, ane sweit and trimbilling
Him tuik quhile he was readie to expire;
To beir his scheild his breast began to tyre:
Within ane quhyle he changit mony hew,
And nevertheles not ane ane uther knew."

Laing's *Poems of Henryson* (Edinburgh, 1865), p. 93. This volume is unfortunately not too common; but 'The Testament and Complaint of Cressid' may also be found under Chaucer in Chalmers's Poets (i. 298 for this passage).

was wont. Nor is this half-borrowed interest by any means the only one. The Cressid story, indeed, does not reach its full attraction as a direct subject of literary treatment till the fourteenth century. But the great Alexander cycle gives us work which merely as poetry equals all but the very best mediæval work, and its importance in connection with the famous metre named from it is of itself capital.

The Alexandreid.

In interest, bulk, and importance these two stories —the Story of the Destruction of Troy and the Alexandreid—far outstrip all the other romances of antiquity; they are more accessible than the rest, and have been the subject of far more careful investigation by modern students. Little has been added, or is likely to be added, in regard to the Troy-books generally, since M. Joly's introduction to Benoît's *Roman de Troie* six-and-twenty years ago,[1] and it is at least improbable that much will be added to M. Paul Meyer's handling of the old French treatments of the Alexandreid in his *Alexandre le Grand dans la Littérature Française au Moyen Age*.[2] For it must once more be said that the pre-eminence of French over other literatures in this volume is not due to any crotchet of the writer, or to any desire to speak of what he has known pretty thoroughly, long, and at first-hand, in preference to that which he

[1] *Le Roman de Troie.* Par Benoît de Sainte-More. Ed. Joly. Paris, 1870.

[2] Paris, 1886. The number of monographs on this subject is, however, very large, and I should like at least to add Mr Wallis Budge's *Alexander the Great* (the Syriac version of Callisthenes), Cambridge, 1889, and his subsequent *Life and Exploits of Alexander*.

knows less thoroughly, less of old, and in parts at second-hand. It is the simplest truth to say that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries France kept the literary school of Europe, and that, with the single exception of Iceland, during a part, and only a part, of the time, all the nations of Europe were content to do, each in its own tongue, and sometimes even in hers, the lessons which she taught, the exercises which she set them. That the scholars sometimes far surpassed their masters is quite true, and is nothing unusual; that they were scholars is simple fact.

Callisthenes.

The Alexander story, which Mr Wallis Budge, our chief authority (and perhaps *the* chief authority) on the Oriental versions of it, speaks of as "a book which has had more readers than any other, the Bible alone excepted," is of an antiquity impossible to determine in any manner at all certain. Nor is the exact place of its origin, or the language in which it was originally written, to be pronounced upon with anything like confidence. What does seem reasonably sure is that what is called "the Pseudo-Callisthenes"—that is to say, the fabulous biography of the great king, which is certainly the basis of all Western, and perhaps that of most Eastern, versions of the legend—was put into Greek at least as early as the third century after Christ, and thence into Latin (by "Julius Valerius" or another) before the middle of the fourth. And it appears probable that some of the Eastern versions, if not themselves the original (and a strong fight has been made for the Æthiopic or Old-Egyptian origin of nearly the whole), represent

Greek texts older than those we have, as well as in some cases other Eastern texts which may be older still. Before any modern Western vernacular handled the subject, there were Alexander legends, not merely in Greek and Latin, not merely in Æthiopic or Coptic, but in Armenian and Syriac, in Hebrew and Arabic, in Persian and perhaps in Turkish: and it is possible that, either indirectly before the Crusades, or directly through and after them, the legend as told in the West received additions from the East.

As a whole, however, the Pseudo-Callisthenes, or rather his Latin interpreter Julius Valerius,[1] was the main source of the mediæval legend of Alexander. And it is not at all impossible (though the old vague assertions that this or that mediæval characteristic or development was derived from the East were rarely based on any solid foundation so far as their authors knew) that this Alexander legend did, at second-hand, and by suggesting imitation of its contents and methods, give to some of the most noteworthy parts of mediæval literature itself an Eastern colouring, perhaps to some extent even an Eastern substance,

Latin versions.

Still the direct sources of knowledge in the West were undoubtedly Latin versions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes, one of which, that ascribed to Julius Valerius, appears, as has been said, to have existed before the middle of the fourth century, while the other, sometimes called the *Historia de Prœliis*, is later by a good deal. Later still, and repre-

[1] Most conveniently accessible in the Teubner collection, ed. Kübler, Leipzig, 1888.

senting traditions necessarily different from and later than those of the Callisthenes book, was the source of the most marvellous elements in the Alexandreids of the twelfth and subsequent centuries, the *Iter ad Paradisum*, in which the conquerer was represented as having journeyed to the Earthly Paradise itself. After this, connected as it was with dim Oriental fables as to his approach to the unknown regions north-east of the Caucasus, and his making gates to shut out Gog, there could be no further difficulty, and all accretions as to his descent into the sea in a glass cage and so forth came easily.

Their story.

Nor could they, indeed, be said to be so very different in nature from at least the opening part of the Callisthenes version itself. This starts with what seems to be the capital and oldest part of the whole fabulous story, a very circumstantial account of the fictitious circumstances of the birth of Alexander. According to this, which is pretty constantly preserved in all the fabulous versions of the legend (a proof of its age), Nectanabus, an Egyptian king and magician, having ascertained by sortilege (a sort of *kriegs-spiel* on a basin of water with wax ships) that his throne is doomed, quits the country and goes to Macedonia. There he falls in love with Olympias, and during the absence of her husband succeeds by magic arts not only in persuading her that the god Ammon is her lover, but to some extent in persuading King Philip to believe this, and to accept the consequences, the part of Ammon having been played of course by Nectanabus himself. Bucephalus makes

a considerable figure in the story, and Nectanabus devotes much attention to Alexander's education—care which the Prince repays (for no very discernible reason) by pushing his father and tutor into a pit, where the sorcerer dies after revealing the relationship. The rest of the story is mainly occupied by the wars with Dariŭs and Porus (the former a good deal travestied), and two important parts, or rather appendices, of it are epistolary communications between Aristotle and Alexander on the one hand, Alexander and Dindymus (Dandamis, &c.), King of the Brahmins, on the other. After his Indian adventures the king is poisoned by Cassander or at his instigation.

Its developments.

Into a framework of this kind fables of the sort above mentioned had, it will be seen, not the remotest difficulty in fitting themselves; and it was not even a very long step onward to make Alexander a Christian, equip him with twelve peers, and the like. But it has been well demonstrated by M. Paul Meyer that though the fictitious narrative obtained wide acceptance, and even admission into their historical compilations by Vincent of Beauvais, Ekkehard, and others, a more sober tradition as to the hero obtained likewise. If we were more certain than we are as to the exact age of Quintus Curtius, it would be easier to be certain likewise how far he represents and how far he is the source of this more sober tradition. It seems clear that the Latin *Alexandreis* of Walter of Châtillon is derived from him, or from a common source, rather than from Valerius-Callisthenes: while M. Meyer has dwelt upon a Latin

compilation perhaps as old as the great outburst of vernacular romance on Alexander, preserved only in English MSS. at Oxford and Cambridge, and probably of English composition, which is a perfectly common-sense account based upon historians, of various dates and values, indeed, ranging from Trogus to Isidore of Seville, but all historians and not romancers.

In this path, however, comparatively few cared to tread. The attraction for the twelfth century lay elsewhere. Sometimes a little of the more authentic matter was combined with the fabulous, and at least one instance occurs where the author, probably in the thirteenth century, simply combined, with a frank audacity which is altogether charming, the popular epitome of Valerius and the sober compilation just referred to. The better, more famous, and earlier romantic work is taken straight from, though it by no means confines itself to, Valerius, the *Historia de Prœliis*, and the *Iter ad Paradisum*. The results of this handling are enormous in bulk, and in minor varieties; but they are for general purposes sufficiently represented by the great *Roman d'Alixandre*[1] in French, the long and interesting English *King Alisaunder*,[2] and perhaps the German of Lamprecht. The Icelandic Alexander-Saga, though of the thirteenth century, is derived from Walter of Châtillon, and so reflects the comparatively sober side of the story. Of all the others the *Roman d'Alixandre* is the most immediate parent.

[1] Ed. Michelant, Stuttgart, 1846.
[2] Ed. Weber, *op. cit. sup.*, i. 1-327.

There was, indeed, an older French poem than this —perhaps two such—and till the discovery of a fragment of it six years after the publication in 1846 of the great *Roman d'Alixandre* itself by Michelant, it was supposed that this poem was the original of Lamprecht's German (or of the German by whomsoever it be, for some will have it that Lamprecht is simply Lambert li Tors, *v. infra*). This, however, seems not to be the case. The Alberic fragment[1] (respecting which the philologists, as usual, fight whether it was written by a Besançon man or a Briançon one, or somebody else) is extremely interesting in some ways. For, in the first place, it is written in octosyllabic *tirades* of single assonance or rhyme, a very rare form; in the second, it is in a dialect of Provençal; and in the third, the author not only does not follow, but distinctly and rather indignantly rejects, the story of Nectanabus:—

Alberic of Besançon.

> "Dicunt alquant estrobatour
> Quel reys fud filz d'encantatour:
> Mentent fellon losengetour;
> Mal en credreyz nec un de lour."[2]

But the fragment is unluckily so short (105 lines only) that it is impossible to say much of its matter.

Between this and the Alexandrine poem there is another version,[3] curiously intermediate in form, date, and substance. This is in the ordinary form of the older, but not oldest, *chansons de geste*, decasyllabic rhymed *tirades*. There are only about eight hundred lines of it, which have been eked

The decasyllabic poem.

[1] Ed. Meyer, *op. cit.*, i. 1-9. [2] Ll. 27-30. [3] Meyer, i. 25-59.

out, by about ten thousand Alexandrines from the later and better known poem, in the MSS. which remain. The decasyllabic part deals with the youth of Alexander, and though the author does not seem, any more than Alberic, to have admitted the scandal about Nectanabus, the death of that person is introduced, and altogether we see a Callisthenic influence. The piece has been very highly praised for literary merit; it seems to me certainly not below, but not surprisingly above, the average of the older *chansons* in this respect. But in so much of the poem as remains to us no very interesting part of the subject is attacked.

The great romance is in more fortunate conditions. We have it not indeed complete (for it does not go to the death of the hero) but in ample measure: and fortunately it has for full half a century been accessible to the student. When M. Paul Meyer says that this edition "ne saurait fournir une base suffisante à une étude critique sur le roman d'Alixandre," he is of course using the word *critique* with the somewhat arbitrary limitations of the philological specialist. The reader who cares for literature first of all—for the book as a book to read—will find it now complete for his criticism in the Stuttgart version of the *Alixandre*, though he cannot be too grateful to M. Meyer for his second volume as a whole, and for the printing in the first of Alberic, and the decasyllabic poem, and for the extracts from that of Thomas of Kent, who, unlike the authors of the great Romance, admitted the Nectanabus marvels and intrigues.

The great Roman d'Alixandre.

The story is of such importance in mediæval literature that some account of the chief English and French embodiments of it may be desirable. The French version, attributed in shares, which have as usual exercised the adventurous ingenuity of critics, to two authors, Lambert li Tors, the Crooked (the older designation "Li Cors," the Short, seems to be erroneous), and Alexander of Bernay or Paris, occupies in the standard edition of Michelant 550 pages, holding, when full and with no blanks or notes, 38 lines each. It must, therefore, though the lines are not continuously numbered, extend to over 20,000. It begins with Alexander's childhood, and though the paternity of Nectanabus is rejected here as in the decasyllabic version, which was evidently under the eyes of the authors, yet the enchanter is admitted as having a great influence on the Prince's education. This portion, filling about fifteen pages, is followed by another of double the length, describing a war with Nicolas, King of Cesarea, an unhistorical monarch, who in the Callisthenic fiction insults Alexander. He is conquered and his kingdom given to Ptolemy. Next Alexander threatens Athens, but is turned from his wrath by Aristotle; and coming home, prevents his father's marriage with Cleopatra, who is sent away in disgrace. And then, omitting the poisoning of Philip by Olympias and her paramour, which generally figures, the Romance goes straight to the war with Darius. This is introduced (in a manner which made a great impression on the Middle Ages,

as appears in a famous passage of our wars with France[1]) by an insulting message and present of childish gifts from the Persian king. Alexander marches to battle, bathes in the Cydnus, crosses "Lube" and "Lutis," and passing by a miraculous knoll which made cowards brave and brave men fearful, arrives at Tarsus, which he takes. The siege of Tyre comes next, and holds a large place; but a very much larger is occupied by the *Fuerres de Gadres* ("Foray of Gaza"), where the story of the obstinate resistance of the Philistine city is expanded into a kind of separate *chanson de geste*, occupying 120 pages and some five thousand lines.

In contradistinction to this prolixity, the visit to Jerusalem, and the two battles of Arbela and Issus mixed into one, are very rapidly passed over, though the murder of Darius and Alexander's vengeance for it are duly mentioned. Something like a new beginning (thought by some to coincide with a change of authors) then occurs, and the more marvellous part of the narrative opens. After passing the desert and (for no very clear object) visiting the bottom of the sea in a glass case, Alexander begins his campaign with Porus, whom Darius had summoned to his aid. The actual fighting does not take very long; but there is an elaborate description of the strange tribes and other wonders of India. Porus fights again in Bactria and is again beaten, after which Alexander pursues his allies Gog and Magog and shuts them off by his famous wall. An arrangement with Porus and a

[1] See *Henry V.* for the tennis-ball incident.

visit to the Pillars of Hercules follow. The return is begun, and marvels come thicker and thicker. Strange beasts and amphibious men attack the Greeks. The "Valley from which None Return" presents itself, and Alexander can only obtain passage for his army by devoting himself, though he manages to escape by the aid of a grateful devil whom he sets free from bondage. At the sea-shore sirens beset the host, and numbers perish; after which hairy horned old men tell them of the three magic fountains —the Fountain of Youth, the Fountain (visible only once a-year) of Immortality, and the Fountain of Resurrection. Many monstrous tribes of enemies supervene; also a Forest of Maidens, kind but of hamadryad nature—"flower-women," as they have been poetically called. It is only after this experience that they come to the Fountain of Youth—the Fontaine de Jouvence—which has left such an indelible impression on tradition. Treachery had deprived Alexander of access to that of Immortality; and that of Resurrection has done nothing but restore two cooked fish to life. But after suffering intense cold, and passing through a rain of blood, the army arrives at the Jouvence, bathes therein, and all become as men thirty years old. The fountain is a branch of the Euphrates, the river of Paradise. After this they come to the Trees of the Sun and Moon—speaking trees which foretell Alexander's death. Porus hears of this, and when the army returns to India he picks a quarrel, and the two kings fight. Bucephalus is mortally wounded; but Porus is killed.

The beginnings of treason, plots against Alexander, and the episode of Queen Candace (who has, however, been mentioned before) follow. The king marches on Babylon and soars into the air in a car drawn by griffins. At Babylon there is much fighting; indeed, except the Foray of Gaza, this is the chief part of the book devoted to that subject, the Persian and Indian wars having been, as we saw, but lightly treated. The Amazons are brought in next; but fighting recommences with the siege of "Defur." An enchanted river, which whosoever drinks he becomes guilty of cowardice or treachery, follows; and then we return to Tarsus and Candace, that courteous queen. Meanwhile the traitors Antipater and "Divinuspater" continue plotting, and though Alexander is warned against them by his mother Olympias, they succeed in poisoning him. The death of the king and the regret of his Twelve Peers, to whom he has distributed his dominions, finish the poem.

Form, &c.

In form this poem resembles in all respects the *chansons de geste*. It is written in mono-rhymed *laisses* of the famous metre which owes its name and perhaps its popularity to the use of it in this romance. Part of it at least cannot be later than the twelfth century; and though in so long a poem, certainly written by more than one, and in all likelihood by more than two, there must be inequality, this inequality is by no means very great. The best parts of the poem are the marvels. The fighting is not quite so good as in the *chansons de geste* proper; but the marvels are excellent, the poet relat-

ing them with an admirable mixture of gravity and complaisance, in spirited style and language, and though with extremely little attention to coherence and verisimilitude, yet with no small power of what may be called fabulous attraction.

It is also characteristic in having been freely continued. Two authors, Guy of Cambray and Jean le Nevelois, composed a *Vengeance Alexandre*. The *Vœux du Paon*, which develop some of the episodes of the main poem, were almost as famous at the time as *Alixandre* itself. Here appears the popular personage of Gadiffer, and hence was in part derived the great prose romance of Perceforest. Less interesting in itself, but curious as illustrating the tendency to branch up and down to all parts of a hero's pedigree, is *Florimont*, a very long octosyllabic poem, perhaps as old as the twelfth century, dealing with Alexander's grandfather.[1]

Continuations.

The principal and earliest version of the English *Alexander* is accessible without much difficulty in Weber's *Metrical Romances of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Centuries.* Its differences from the French original are, however, very well worth noting. That it only extends to about eight thousand octosyllabic lines instead of some twenty thousand Alexandrines is enough to show that a good deal is omitted; and an indication in some little detail

King Alexander.

[1] In this paragraph I again speak at second-hand, for neither the *Vœux* nor *Florimont* is to my knowledge yet in print. The former seems to have supplied most of the material of the poem in fifteenth-century Scots, printed by the Bannatyne Club in 1831, and to be reprinted, in another version, by the Scottish Text Society.

of its contents may therefore not be without interest. It should be observed that besides this and the Scots *Alexander* (see note above) an alliterative *Romance of Alexander and Dindymus*[1] exists, and perhaps others. But until some one supplements Mr Ward's admirable *Catalogue of Romances in the British Museum* with a similar catalogue for the minor libraries of the United Kingdom, it will be very difficult to give complete accounts of matters of this kind.

Our present poem may be of the thirteenth century, and is pretty certainly not long posterior to it. It begins, after the system of English romances, with a kind of moral prologue on the various lives and states of men of "Middelerd." Those who care for good literature and good learning are invited to hear a noble *geste* of Alisaundre, Darye, and Pore, with wonders of worm and beast. After a geographical prologue the story of Nectanabus, "Neptanabus," is opened, and his determination to revenge himself on Philip of Macedon explained by the fact of that king having headed the combination against Egypt. The design on Olympias, and its success, are very fully expounded. Nectanabus tells the queen, in his first interview with her, "a high master in Egypt I was"; and about eight hundred lines carry us to the death of Nectanabus and the breaking of "Bursifal" (Bucephalus) by the Prince. The episodes of Nicolas (who is here King of Carthage) and of Cleopatra follow; but when the expedition against Darius is reached, the

[1] E.E.T.S., 1878, edited by Professor Skeat.

mention of "Lube" in the French text seems to have induced the English poet to carry his man by Tripoli, instead of Cilicia, and bring him to the oracle of Ammon—indeed in all the later versions of the story the crossing of the purely fantastic Callisthenic romance with more or less historical matter is noticeable. The "Bishop" of Ammon, by the way, assures him that Philip is really his father. The insulting presents follow the siege of Tyre; the fighting with Darius, though of course much mediævalised, is brought somewhat more into accordance with the historic account, though still the Granicus does not appear; the return to Greece and the capture of Thebes have their place; and the Athens-Aristotle business is also to some extent critically treated. Then the last battle with Darius comes in: and his death concludes the first part of the piece in about five thousand lines. It is noticeable that the "Foray of Gaza" is entirely omitted; and indeed, as above remarked, it bears every sign of being a separate poem.

The second part deals with "Pore"—in other words, with the Indian expedition and its wonders. These are copied from the French, but by no means slavishly. The army is, on the whole, even worse treated by savage beasts and men on its way to India than in the original; but the handling, including the Candace episodes, follows the French more closely than in the first part. The fighting at "Defur," however, like that at Gaza, is omitted; and the wilder and more mystical and luxuriant parts of the story — the three

Fountains, the Sirens, the flower-maidens, and the like—are either omitted likewise or handled more prosaically.[1]

One of the most curious things about this poem is that every division — divisions of which Weber made chapters—begins by a short gnomic piece in the following style:—

> "Day spryng is jolyf tide.
> He that can his tyme abyde,
> Oft he schal his wille bytyde.
> Loth is gentil man to chyde."

Characteristics.

The treatment of the Alexander story thus well illustrates one way of the mediæval mind with such things —the way of combining at will incongruous stories, of accepting with no, or with little, criticism any tale of wonder that it happened to find in books, of using its own language, applying its own manners, supposing its own clothing, weapons, and so forth to have prevailed at any period of history. And further, it shows how the *geste* theory—the theory of working out family connections and stories of ancestors and successors—could not fail to be applied to any subject that at all lent itself to such treatment. But, on the other hand, this division of the romances of antiquity does not exhibit the more fertile, the more inventive, the more poetical, and generally the nobler

[1] Dr Kölbing, who in combination of philological and literary capacity is second among Continental students of romance only to M. Gaston Paris, appears to have convinced himself of the existence of a great unknown English poet who wrote not only *Alisaundre*, but *Arthour and Merlin*, *Richard Cœur de Lion*, and other pieces. I should much like to believe this.

traits of Middle-Age literature. As will have been noted, there was little invention in the later versions, the Callisthenic fictions and the *Iter ad Paradisum* being, with a few Oriental accretions, almost slavishly relied upon for furnishing out the main story, though the "Foray of Gaza," the "Vows of the Peacock," and *Florimont* exhibit greater independence. Yet again no character, no taking and lively story, is elaborated. Nectanabus has a certain personal interest: but he was given to, not invented by, the Romance writers. Olympias has very little character in more senses than one: Candace is not worked out: and Alexander himself is entirely colourless. The fantastic story, and the wonders with which it was bespread, seem to have absorbed the attention of writers and hearers; and nobody seems to have thought of any more. Perhaps this was merely due to the fact that none of the more original genius of the time was directed on it: perhaps to the fact that the historical element in the story, small as it was, cramped the inventive powers, and prevented the romancers from doing their best.

The Tale of Troy.

In this respect the Tale of Troy presents a remarkable contrast to its great companion — a contrast pervading, and almost too remarkable to be accidental. Inasmuch as this part of mediæval dealings with antiquity connects itself with the literary history of two of the very greatest writers of our own country, Chaucer and Shakespeare; with that of one of the greatest writers of Italy, Boccaccio; and with some of the most noteworthy work in Old French, it has been thoroughly and repeatedly inves-

tigated.[1] But it is so important, and so characteristic of the time with which we are dealing, that it cannot be passed over here, though the later developments must only be referred to in so far as they help us to understand the real originality, which was so long, and still is sometimes, denied to mediæval writers. In this case, as in the other, the first striking point is the fact that the Middle Ages, having before them what may be called, *mutatis mutandis*, canonical and apocryphal, authentic and unauthentic, ancient and not ancient, accounts of a great literary matter, chose, by an instinct which was not probably so wrong as it has sometimes seemed, the apocryphal in preference to the canonical, the unauthentic in preference to the authentic, the modern in preference to the ancient.

As in the case of the Alexander-Saga, their origins were the Pseudo-Callisthenes and the *Iter ad Paradisum*, so in the Tale of Troy they were the works of two persons whose literary offspring has obtained for them an amount of attention transcending to a quite ludicrous extent their literary merit—Dictys Cretensis and Dares Phrygius, to whom may perhaps be added the less shadowy personage of the grammarian John Tzetzes. But, as in the other case also, they were by no means confined to such authorities. If they did not know Homer very well at first-hand, they did know him: they knew Ovid (who of

Dictys and Dares.

[1] It would be unfair not to mention, as having preceded that of M. Joly by some years, and having practically founded study on the right lines, the handling of MM. Moland and d'Héricault, *Nouvelles Françaises du Quatorzième Siècle* (Bibliothèque Elzévirienne. Paris, 1856).

course represents Homer, though not Homer only) extremely well: and they knew Virgil. But partly from the instinct above referred to, of which more presently, partly from the craze for tracing Western Europe back to the "thrice-beaten Trojans," it pleased them to regard Homer as a late and unhistorical calumniator, whose Greek prejudices made him bear false witness; and to accept the pretensions of Dictys and Dares to be contemporaries and eyewitnesses of fact. Dictys, a companion of Idomeneus, was supposed to represent the Greek side, but more fairly than Homer; and Dares, priest of Hephæstus, the Trojan.

The works of these two worthies, which are both of small compass,—Dictys occupies rather more than a hundred, Dares rather more than fifty, pages of the ordinary Teubner classics,[1]—exist at present only in Latin prose, though, as the Greeks were more expert and inventive forgers than the Romans, it is possible, if not even highly probable, that both were, and nearly certain that Dictys was, originally Greek at least in language. Dictys, the older pretty certainly, is introduced by a letter to a certain Quintus Aradius from Lucius Septimius, who informs "his Rufinus" and the world, with a great deal of authority and learning, that the book had been written by Dictys in Punic letters, which Cadmus and Agenor had then made of common use in Greece; that some shepherds found the manuscript written on linden-bark paper in a tin case at his tomb at Gnossus; that their landlord turning the Punic letters into Greek (which had always

[1] Ed. Meister. Leipzig, 1872-73.

been the language), gave it to Nero the Emperor, who rewarded him richly; and that he, Septimius, having by chance got the book into his hands, thought it worth while to translate it into Latin, both for the sake of making the true history known and "ut otiosi animi desidiam discuteremus." The Dares volume is more ambitious, and purports to be introduced by no less a person than Cornelius Nepos to no less a person than Sallustius Crispus, and to have been "faithfully translated" by the former from MS. in the very hand of Dares, which he found at Athens, in order to correct the late and fabulous authority of Homer, who actually makes gods fight with men!

It will be, of course, obvious to the merest tyro in criticism that these prefaces bear "forgery" on the very face of them. The first is only one of those innumerable variants of the genesis of a fiction which Sir Walter Scott has so pleasantly summarised in one of his introductions; and the phrase quoted about *animi otiosi desidiam* is a commonplace of mediæval bookmaking. The second, more cleverly arranged, exposes itself to the question how far, putting the difficulty about writing aside, an ancient Greek MS. of the kind could possibly have escaped the literary activity of many centuries of Athenian wits and scholars, to fall into the hands of Cornelius Nepos. The actual age and origin of the two have, of course, occupied many modern scholars; and the favourite opinion seems to be that Dictys may have been originally written by some Greek about the time of Nero (the Latin translation

cannot well be earlier than the fourth century and may be much later), while Dares may possibly be as late as the twelfth. Neither book is of the very slightest interest intrinsically. Dictys (the full title of whose book is *Ephemeris Belli Trojani*) is not only the longer but the better written of the two. It contains no direct "set" at Homer; and may possibly preserve traits of some value from the lost cyclic writers. But it was not anything like such a favourite with the Middle Ages as Dares. Dictys had contented himself with beginning at the abduction of Helen; Dares starts his *De Excidio Trojæ* with the Golden Fleece, and excuses the act of Paris as mere reprisals for the carrying off of Hesione by Telamon. Antenor having been sent to Greece to demand reparation and rudely treated, Paris makes a regular raid in vengeance, and so the war begins with a sort of balance of cause for it on the Trojan side. Before the actual fighting, some personal descriptions of the chief heroes and heroines are given, curiously feeble and strongly tinged with mediæval peculiarities, but thought to be possibly derived from some similar things attributed to the rhetorician Philostratus at the end of the third century. And among these a great place is given to Troilus and "Briseida."

The Dares story.

Nearly half the book is filled with these preliminaries, with an account of the fruitless embassy of Ulysses and Diomed to Troy, and with enumerating the forces and allies of the two parties. But when Dares gets to work he proceeds with a rapidity which

may be partly due to the desire to contradict Homer. The landing and death of Protesilaus, avenged to some extent by Achilles, the battle in which Hector slays Patroclus (to whom Dares adds Meriones), and that at the ships, are all lumped together; and the funerals of Protesilaus and Patroclus are simultaneously celebrated. Palamedes begins to plot against Agamemnon. The fighting generally goes much against the Greeks; and Agamemnon sues for a three years' truce, which is granted despite Hector's very natural suspicion of such an uncommonly long time. It is skipped in a line; and then, the fighting having gone against the Trojans, they beg for a six months' truce in their turn. This is followed by a twelve days' fight and a thirty days' truce asked by the Greeks. Then comes Andromache's dream, the fruitless attempt to prevent Hector fighting, and his death at the hands of Achilles. After more truces, Palamedes supplants Agamemnon, and conducts the war with pretty good success. Achilles sees Polyxena at the tomb of Hector, falls in love with her, demands her hand, and is promised it if he can bring about peace. In the next batch of fighting, Palamedes kills Deiphobus and Sarpedon, but is killed by Paris; and in consequence a fresh battle at the ships and the firing of them takes place, Achilles abstaining, but Ajax keeping up the battle till (natural) night. Troilus then becomes the hero of a seven days' battle followed by the usual truce, during which Agamemnon tries to coax Achilles out of the sulks, and on his refusal holds a great council of war. When next *tempus pugnæ*

supervenit (a stock phrase of the book) Troilus is again the hero, wounds everybody, including Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Diomed, and very reasonably opposes a six months' armistice which his father grants. At its end he again bears all before him; but, killing too many Myrmidons, he at last excites Achilles, who, though at first wounded, kills him at last by wounding his horse, which throws him. Memnon recovers the body of Troilus, but is himself killed. The death of Achilles in the temple of Apollo (by ambush, but, of course, with no mention of the unenchanted heel), and of Ajax and Paris in single fight, leads to the appearance of the Amazons, who beat the Greeks, till Penthesilea is killed by Neoptolemus. Antenor, Æneas, and others urge peace, and on failing to prevail with Priam, begin to parley with the Greeks. There is no Trojan horse, but the besiegers are treacherously introduced at a gate *ubi extrinsecus portam equi sculptum caput erat.* Antenor and Æneas receive their reward; but the latter is banished because he has concealed Polyxena, who is massacred when discovered by Neoptolemus. Helenus, Cassandra, and Andromache go free: and the book ends with the beautifully precise statements that the war, truces and all, lasted ten years, six months, and twelve days; that 886,000 men fell on the Greek side, and 676,000 on the Trojan; that Æneas set out in twenty-two ships ("the same with which Paris had gone to Greece," says the careful Dares), and 3400 men, while 2500 followed Antenor, and 1200 Helenus and Andromache.

This bald summary is scarcely balder than the book itself, which also, as can be seen from the summary, and would be more fully seen from the book, has no literary merit of any kind. It reads more like an excessively uninspired *précis* of a larger work than like anything else—a *précis* in which all the literary merit has, with unvarying infelicity, been omitted. Nothing can be more childish than the punctilious euhemerism by which all the miraculous elements of the Homeric story are blinked or explained away, unless it be the painstaking endeavour simply to say something different from Homer, or the absurd alternation of fighting and truces, in which each party invariably gives up its chance of finishing the war at the precise time at which that chance is most flourishing, and which reads like a humorous travesty of the warfare of some historic periods with all the humour left out.

Its absurdity.

Nevertheless it is not really disgraceful to the Romantic period that it fastened so eagerly on this sorriest of illegitimate epitomes.[1] Very few persons at that time were in case to compare the literary merit of Homer—even that of Ovid and Virgil—with the literary merit of these bald pieces of bad Latin prose. Moreover, the supernatural elements in the Homeric story, though very congenial to the temper of the Middle Age itself, were presented and ascribed in such a fashion that it was almost impossible for that age to adopt them. Putting aside

Its capabilities.

[1] The British Museum alone (see Mr Ward's *Catalogue of Romances*, vol. i.) contains some seventeen separate MSS. of Dares.

a certain sentimental cult of "Venus la déesse d'amors," there was nothing of which the mediæval mind was more tranquilly convinced than that "Jubiter," "Appollin," and the rest were not mere fond things vainly invented, but actual devils who had got themselves worshipped in the pagan times. It was impossible for a devout Christian man, whatever pranks he might play with his own religion, to represent devils as playing the part of saints and of the Virgin, helping the best heroes, and obtaining their triumph. Nor, audacious as was the faculty of "transfer" possessed by the mediæval genius, was it easy to Christianise the story in any other way. It is perhaps almost surprising that, so far as I know or remember, no version exists representing Cassandra as a holy and injured nun, making Our Lady play the part of Venus to Æneas, and even punishing the sacrilegious Diomed for wounding her. But I do not think I have heard of such a version (though Sir Walter has gone near to representing something parallel in *Ivanhoe*), and it would have been a somewhat violent escapade for even a mediæval fancy.

So, with that customary and restless ability to which we owe so much, and which has been as a rule so much slighted, it seized on the negative capacities of the story. Dares gives a wretched painting, but a tolerable canvas and frame. Each section of his meagre narrative is capable of being worked out by sufficiently busy and imaginative operators into a complete *roman d'aventures:* his facts, if meagre and jejune, are numerous. The raids and

reprisals in the cases of Hesione and Helen suited the demands of the time; and, as has been hinted, the singular interlardings of truce and war, and the shutting up of the latter into so many days' hand-to-hand fighting, — with no strategy, no care for communications, no scientific nonsense of any kind,—were exactly to mediæval taste.

Above all, the prominence of new heroes and heroines, about whom not very much was said, and whose *gestes* the mediæval writer could accordingly fill up at his own will, with the presentation of others in a light different from that of the classical accounts, was a godsend. Achilles, as the principal author of the "Excidium Trojæ" (the title of the Dares book, and after it of others), must be blackened; and though Dares himself does not contain the worst accusations of the mediæval writers against the unshorn son of the sea-goddess, it clears the way for them by taking away the excuse of the unjust deprivation of Briseis. From this to making him not merely a factious partisan, but an unfair fighter, who mobs his enemies half to death with Myrmidons before he engages them himself, is not far. On the other hand, Troilus, a mere name in the older stories, offers himself as a hero. And for a heroine, the casual mention of the charms of Briseida in Dares started the required game. Helen was too puzzling, as well as too Greek; Andromache only a faithful wife; Cassandra a scolding sorceress; Polyxena a victim. Briseida had almost a clear record, as after the confusion with Chryseis (to be altered in name after-

Troilus and Briseida.

wards) there was very little personality left in her, and she could for that very reason be dealt with as the romancers pleased.

In the subsequent and vernacular handling of the story the same difference of alternation is at first perceived as that which appears in the Alexander legend. The sobriety of Gautier of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* is matched and its Latinity surpassed by the *Bellum Trojanum* of our countryman Joseph of Exeter, who was long and justly praised as about the best mediæval writer of classical Latin verse. But this neighbourhood of the streams of history and fiction ceases much earlier in the Trojan case, and for very obvious reasons. The temperament of mediæval poets urged them to fill in and fill out: the structure of the Daretic epitome invited them to do so: and they very shortly did it.

The Roman de Troie.

After some controversy, the credit of first "romancing" the Tale of Troy has been, it would seem justly and finally, assigned to Benoît de Sainte-More. Benoît, whose flourishing time was about 1160, who was a contemporary and rival of Wace, and who wrote a chronicle of Normandy even longer than his Troy-book, composed the latter in more than thirty thousand octosyllabic lines, an expansion of the fifty pages of Dares, which stands perhaps almost alone even among the numerous similar feats of mediæval bards. He has helped himself freely with matter from Dictys towards the end of his work; but, as we have seen, even this reinforcement could not be great in bulk. Expansion, however,

so difficult to some writers, was never in the least a stumbling-block to the *trouvère*. It was rather a bottomless pit into which he fell, traversing in his fall lines and pages with endless alacrity of sinning.

Not that Benoît is by any means a person to be contemptuously spoken of. In the first place, as we shall see presently, he was for many hundred years completely and rather impudently robbed of his fame; in the second, he is the literary ancestor of far greater men than himself; and in the third, his verse, though not free from the besetting sin of its kind, and especially of the octosyllabic variety—the sin of smooth but insignificant fluency—is always pleasant, and sometimes picturesque. Still there is no doubt that at present the second claim is the strongest with us; and that if Benoît de Sainte-More had not, through his plagiarist Colonna, been the original of Boccaccio and Chaucer and Shakespeare, he would require little more than a bare mention here.

The phases of Cressid.

Dares, as we have seen, mentions Briseida, and extols her beauty and charm: she was, he says, "beautiful, not of lofty stature, fair, her hair yellow and silky, her eyebrows joined, her eyes lively, her body well proportioned, kind, affable, modest, of a simple mind, and pious." He also mightily extols Troilus; but he does not intimate any special connection between the two, or tell the story of "Cressid," which indeed his followers elaborated in terms not altogether consistent with some of the above laudatory epithets. Tzetzes, who with some others gives her the alternative name of Hippodamia,

alters her considerably, and assigns to her tall stature, a white complexion, black hair, as well as specially comely breasts, cheeks, and nose, skill in dress, a pleasant smile, but a distinct tendency to "arrogance." Both these writers, however, with Joseph of Exeter and others, seem to be thinking merely of the Briseis whom we know from Homer as the mistress of Achilles, and do not connect her with Calchas, much less with Troilus. What may be said with some confidence is that the confusion of Briseida with the daughter of Calchas and the assignment of her to Troilus as his love originated with Benoît de Sainte-More. But we must perhaps hesitate a little before assigning to him quite so much credit as has sometimes been allowed him. Long before Shakespeare received the story in its full development (for though he does not carry it to the bitter end in *Troilus and Cressida* itself, the allusion to the "lazar kite of Cressid's kind" in *Henry V.* shows that he knew it) it had reached that completeness through the hands of Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Henryson, the least of whom was capable of turning a comparatively barren *donnée* into a rich possession, and who as a matter of fact each added much. We do not find in the Norman *trouvère*, and it would be rather wonderful if we did find, the gay variety of the *Filostrato* and its vivid picture of Cressid as merely passionate, Chaucer's admirable Pandarus and his skilfully blended heroine, or the infinite pathos of Henryson's final interview. Still, all this great and moving romance would have been impossible without the idea of Cressid's successive sojourn in Troy and the Greek

camp, and of her successive courtship by Troilus and by Diomed. And this Benoît really seems to have thought of first. His motives for devising it have been rather idly inquired into. For us it shall be sufficient that he did devise it.

By an easy confusion with Chryses and Chryseis —half set right afterwards in the change from Briseida to Griseida in Boccaccio and Creseide in Chaucer— he made his heroine the daughter of Calchas. The priest, a traitor to Troy but powerful with the Greeks, has left his daughter in the city and demands her— a demand which, with the usual complacency noticed above as characterising the Trojans in Dares himself, is granted, though they are very angry with Calchas. But Troilus is already the damsel's lover; and a bitter parting takes place between them. She is sent, gorgeously equipped, to the Greeks; and it happens to be Diomed who receives her. He at once makes the fullest declarations—for in nothing did the Middle Age believe more fervently than in the sentiment,

"Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

But Briseida, with a rather excessive politeness, and leaving him a good deal of hope, informs him that she has already a fair friend yonder. Whereat, as is reasonable, he is not too much discouraged. It must be supposed that this is related to Troilus, for in the next fight he, after Diomed has been wounded, reproaches Briseida pretty openly. He is not wrong, for Briseida weeps at Diomed's wound, and (to the regret and reproof of her historian, and indeed against

her own conscience) gives herself to the Greek, or determines to do so, on the philosophical principle that Troilus is lost to her. Achilles then kills Troilus himself, and we hear no more of the lady.

The volubility of Benoît assigns divers long speeches to Briseida, in which favourable interpreters have seen the germ of the future Cressid; and in which any fair critic may see the suggestion of her. But it is little more than a suggestion. Of the full and masterly conception of Cressid as a type of woman which was afterwards reached, Troilus, and Diomed, and Pandarus, and the wrath of the gods were essential features. Here Troilus is a shadow, Diomed not much more, Pandarus non-existent, the vengeance of Love on a false lover unthought of. Briseida, though she has changed her name, and parentage, and status, is still, as even the patriotic enthusiasm of MM. Moland and d'Héricault (the first who did Benoît justice) perceives, the Briseis of Homer, a slave-girl who changes masters, and for her own pleasure as well as her own safety is chiefly anxious to please the master that is near. The vivifying touch was brought by Boccaccio, and Boccaccio falls out of our story.

The Historia Trojana.

But between Benoît and Boccaccio there is another personage who concerns us very distinctly. Never was there such a case, even in the Middle Ages, when the absence of printing, of public libraries, and of general knowledge of literature made such things easy, of *sic vos non vobis* as the *Historia Trojana* of Guido de Columnis, otherwise Guido delle Colonne, or Guido Colonna, of Mes-

sina. This person appears to have spent some time in England rather late in the thirteenth century; and there, no doubt, he fell in with the *Roman de Troie*. He wrote—in Latin, and thereby appealing to a larger audience than even French could appeal to—a Troy-book which almost at once became widely popular. The MSS. of it occur by scores in the principal libraries of Europe; it was the direct source of Boccaccio, and with that writer's *Filostrato* of Chaucer, and it formed the foundation of almost all the known Troy-books of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Benoît being completely forgotten. Yet recent investigation has shown that Guido not merely adapted Benoît in the usual mediæval fashion, but followed him so closely that his work might rather be called translation than adaptation. At any rate, beyond a few details he has added nothing to the story of Troilus and Cressida as Benoît left it, and as, in default of all evidence to the contrary, it is only fair to conclude that he made it.

From the date, 1287, of Guido delle Colonne's version, it follows necessarily that all the vernacular Troy-books—our own *Destruction of Troy*,[1] the French prose romance of *Troilus*,[2] &c., not to mention Lydgate and others — fall like Boccaccio and Chaucer out of the limits of this volume. Nor can it be necessary to enter into detail as to the other classical French romances, the *Roman de Thèbes*, the *Roman d'Enéas*, the *Roman de Jules César*, *Athis and Profilias*, and the

[1] Ed. Panton and Donaldson, E.E.T.S. London, 1869-74.
[2] Ed. Moland and d'Héricault, *op. cit.*

rest;[1] while something will be said of the German Æneid of H. von Veldeke in a future chapter. The capital examples of the Alexandreid and the Iliad, as understood by the Middle Ages, not only must but actually do suffice for our purpose.

Meaning of the classical romance.

And we see from them very well not merely in what light the Middle Ages regarded the classical stories, but also to what extent the classical stories affected the Middle Ages. This latter point is of the more importance in that even yet the exact bearing and meaning of the Renaissance in this respect is by no means universally comprehended. It may be hoped, if not very certainly trusted, that most educated persons have now got rid of the eighteenth-century notion of mediæval times as being almost totally ignorant of the classics themselves, a notion which careful reading of Chaucer alone should be quite sufficient to dispel. The fact of course is, that all through the Middle Ages the Latin classics were known, unequally but very fairly in most cases, while the earlier Middle Ages at least were by no means ignorant of Greek.

But although there was by no means total ignorance, there was what is to us a scarcely comprehensible want of understanding. To the average mediæval student, perhaps to any mediæval student, it seems seldom or never to have occurred that the men of whom he was reading had lived under a dispensation

[1] The section on "L'Epopée Antique" in M. Petit de Julleville's book, more than once referred to, is by M. Léopold Constans, editor of the *Roman de Thèbes*, and will be found useful.

so different from his own in law and in religion, in politics and in philosophy, in literature and in science, that an elaborate process of readjustment was necessary in order to get at anything like a real comprehension of them. Nor was he, as a rule, able—men of transcendent genius being rather rare, amid a more than respectable abundance of men of talent—to take them, as Chaucer did to a great extent, Dante more intensely though less widely, and Shakespeare (but Shakespeare had already felt the Renaissance spirit) fully and perfectly, on the broad ground of humanity, so that anachronisms, and faults of costume, matter not one jot to any one but a pedant or a fool. When he came to something in the story—something in sentiment, manners, religion, what not—which was out of the range of his own experience, he changed it into something within the range of his own experience. When the whole story did not lend itself to the treatment which he wished to apply, he changed it, added to it, left out from it, without the slightest scruple. He had no more difficulty in transforming the disciplined tactic of the Macedonian phalanx into a series of random *chevauchées* than in adjusting the much more congenial front-fighting of Greeks and Trojans to his own ideas; and it cost him little more to engraft a whole brand-new romantic love-story on the Tale of Troy than to change the historical siege of Gaza into a *Fuerres de Gadres*, of which Aimeri of Narbonne or Raoul de Cambrai would have been the appropriate hero. Sometimes, indeed, he simply confounded Persians and Saracens, just as else-

where he confounded Saracens and Vikings; and he introduced high priests of heathen divinities as bishops, with the same *sang froid* with which long afterwards the translators of the Bible founded an order of "dukes" in Edom.

A study of antiquity conducted in such a fashion could hardly have coloured mediæval thought with any real classicism, even if it had been devoted to much more genuine specimens of antiquity than the semi-Oriental medley of the Pseudo-Callisthenes and the bit of bald euhemerism which had better have been devoted to Hephæstus than ascribed to his priest. But, by another very curious fact, the two great and commanding examples of the Romance of Antiquity were executed each under the influence of the flourishing of one of the two mightiest branches of mediæval poetry proper. When Alberic and the decasyllabist (whoever he was) wrote, the *chanson de geste* was in the very prime of its most vigorous manhood, and the *Roman d'Alixandre* accordingly took not merely the outward form, but the whole spirit of the *chanson de geste* itself. And when Benoît de Sainte-More gave the first shapings of the great story of Troilus and Cressida out of the lifeless rubbish-heap of Dares, it was at the precise minute when also, in hands known or unknown, the greater story of Arthur and Gawain, of Lancelot and Guinevere, was shaping itself from materials probably even scantier. Even Guido of the Columns, much more Boccaccio, had this story fully before them; and Cressida, when at last she becomes herself, has, if nothing of the majesty of Guinevere, a

good deal of Iseult—an Iseult more faithless to love, but equally indifferent to anything except love. As Candace in *Alexander* has the crude though not unamiable naturalism of a *chanson* heroine, so Cressid—so even Briseida to some extent—has the characteristic of the frail angels of Arthurian legend. The cup would have spilled wofully in her husband's hand, the mantle would scarcely have covered an inch of her; but though of coarser make, she is of the same mould with the ladies of the Round Table,—she is of the first creation of the order of romantic womanhood.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAKING OF ENGLISH AND THE SETTLEMENT OF EUROPEAN PROSODY.

SPECIAL INTEREST OF EARLY MIDDLE ENGLISH—DECAY OF ANGLO-SAXON—EARLY MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE—SCANTINESS OF ITS CONSTITUENTS—LAYAMON—THE FORM OF THE 'BRUT'—ITS SUBSTANCE—THE 'ORMULUM': ITS METRE, ITS SPELLING—THE 'ANCREN RIWLE'—THE 'OWL AND THE NIGHTINGALE'—PROVERBS—ROBERT OF GLOUCESTER—ROMANCES—'HAVELOK THE DANE'—'KING HORN'—THE PROSODY OF THE MODERN LANGUAGES—HISTORICAL RETROSPECT—ANGLO-SAXON PROSODY—ROMANCE PROSODY—ENGLISH PROSODY—THE LATER ALLITERATION—THE NEW VERSE—RHYME AND SYLLABIC EQUIVALENCE—ACCENT AND QUANTITY—THE GAIN OF FORM—THE "ACCENT" THEORY—INITIAL FALLACIES, AND FINAL PERVERSITIES THEREOF.

Special interest of Early Middle English.

THE positive achievements of English literature, during the period with which this volume deals, are not at first sight great; and all the more finished literary production of the time, till the extreme end of it, was in French and Latin. But the work done during this time in getting the English language ready for its future duties, in equipping it with grammar and prosody, in preparing, so to speak, for Chaucer, is not only of the first importance

intrinsically, but has a value which is almost unique in general literary history as an example. Nowhere else have we the opportunity of seeing a language and a literature in the process of gestation, or at least of a reformation so great as to be almost equal to new birth. Of the stages which turned Latin through the Romanic vulgar tongues into Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Provençal, French, we have the very scantiest remains; and though the Strasburg oaths and the Eulalia hymn are no doubt inestimable in their way, they supply exceedingly minute and precarious stepping-stones by which to cross from Ausonius to the *Chanson de Roland*. From the earliest literary stages of the Teutonic tongues we have, except in the case of Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic, very little wreckage of time; and Anglo-Saxon at least presents the puzzling characteristic that its earliest remains are, *cæteris paribus*, nearly as complete and developed as the earliest remains of Greek. In German itself, whether High or Low, the change from oldest to youngest is nothing like the change from the English of *Beowulf* to the English of Browning. And though the same process of primordial change as that which we have seen in English took place certainly in German, and possibly in the Romance tongues, it is nowhere traceable with anything like the same clearness or with such gradual development. By the eleventh century at latest in France, by the end of the twelfth in Germany, verse had taken, in the first case fully, in the second almost fully, a modern form. In England it was, during the two hundred years from 1150 to 1350,

working itself steadily, and with ample examples, from pure accent to accentual quantity, and from alliteration to rhyme. Of this process, and those similar to it in other countries, we shall give an account which will serve for the whole in the latter part of this chapter; the actual production and gradual transformation of English language and literature generally may occupy us in the earlier part.

It is to be hoped that by this time a middle way, tolerably free from molestation, may be taken between those historians of English who would have a great gulf fixed before Chaucer, and those who insist upon absolute continuity from Cædmon to Tennyson. There must surely be something between dismissing (as did the best historian of the subject in the last generation) Anglo-Saxon as "that nocturnal portion of our literature," between calling it "impossible to pronounce with certainty whether anything in it is artistically good or bad,"[1] and thinking it proper, as it has sometimes been thought, in an examination in English literature, to give four papers to Cædmon, Ælfric, and Wulfstan, and one to the combined works of Addison, Pope, Johnson, and Burke. Extravagances of the latter kind have still, their heyday of reaction not being quite past, a better chance than extravagances of the former. But both may surely be avoided.

The evidence is rendered more easy in the present connection by the fact, recognised by the most competent authorities in First English or Anglo-Saxon

[1] See Craik, *History of English Literature*, 3d ed. (London, 1866), i. 55.

Decay of Anglo-Saxon.

itself, that for some time before the arbitrary line of the Conquest the productive powers of the literature had been failing, and the language itself was showing signs of change. No poetry of the first class seems to have been written in it much after the end of the ninth century, little prose of a very good class after the beginning of the eleventh; and its inflexions must in time have given way—were, it is said by some, actually giving way—before the results of the invasion and assimilation of French and Latin. The Conquest helped; but it did not wholly cause.

This, however, is no doubt open to argument, and the argument would have to be conducted mainly if not wholly on philological considerations, with which we do not here meddle. The indisputable literary facts are that the canon of pure Anglo-Saxon or Old-English literature closes with the end of the Saxon Chronicle in 1154, and that the "Semi-Saxon," the "First Middle English," which then makes its appearance, approximates, almost decade by decade, almost year by year, nearer and nearer to the modern type. And for our purpose, though not for the purpose of a history of English Literature proper, the contemporary French and Latin writing has to be taken side by side with it.

Early Middle English Literature.

It is not surprising that, although the Latin literary production of the time, especially in history, was at least equal to that of any other European country, and though it is at least probable that some of the greatest achievements

of literature, French in language, are English in nationality, the vernacular should for long have been a little scanty and a little undistinguished in its yield. Periods of moulting, of putting on new skins, and the like, are never periods of extreme physical vigour. And besides, this Anglo-Saxon itself had (as has been said) been distinctly on the wane as a literary language for more than a century, while (as has not yet been said) it had never been very fertile in varieties of profane literature. This infertility is not surprising. Except at rare periods literature without literary competition and comparison is impossible; and the Anglo-Saxons had absolutely no modern literature to compare and compete with. If any existed, their own was far ahead of it. On the other hand, though the supposed ignorance of Latin and even Greek in the "dark" ages has long been known to be a figment of ignorance itself, circumstances connected with, though not confined to, the concentration of learning and teaching in the clergy brought about a disproportionate attention to theology. The result was that the completest Anglo-Saxon library of which we can form any well-based conception would have contained about ten cases of religious to one of non-religious books, and would have held in that eleventh but little poetry, and hardly any prose with an object other than information or practical use.

Scantiness of its constituents.

It could not be expected that the slowly changing language should at once change its habits in this respect. And so, as the century immediately before the Conquest had seen little

but chronicles and homilies, leechdoms and laws, that which came immediately afterwards gave at first no very different products, except that the laws were wanting, for obvious reasons. Nay, the first, the largest, and almost the sole work of *belles lettres* during the first three-fourths of our period, the *Brut* of Layamon, is a work of *belles lettres* without knowing it, and imagines itself to be a sober history, while its most considerable contemporaries, the *Ormulum* and the *Ancren Riwle*, the former in verse, the latter in prose, are both purely religious. At the extreme end of the period the most important and most certain work, Robert of Gloucester's, is, again, a history in verse. About the same time we have, indeed, the romances of *Havelok* and *Horn;* but they are, like most of the other work of the time, translations from the French. The interesting *Poema Morale*, or "Moral Ode," which we have in two forms—one of the meeting-point of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, one fifty years later —is almost certainly older than its earliest extant version, and was very likely pure Saxon. Only in Nicholas of Guilford's *Owl and Nightingale*, about 1250, and perhaps in some of the charming *Specimens of Lyric Poetry*, printed more than fifty years ago by Mr Wright, with a very few other things, do we find pure literature — not the literature of education or edification, but the literature of art and form.

Layamon.

Yet the whole is, for the true student of literature, full enough of interest, while the best things are not in need of praising by allowance. Of Layamon mention has already been made in the

chapter on the Arthurian Legend. But his work covers very much more than the Arthurian matter, and has interests entirely separate from it. Layamon, as he tells us,[1] derived his information from Bede, Wace, and a certain Albinus who has not been clearly identified. But he must have added a great deal of his own, and if it could be decided exactly *how* he added it, the most difficult problem of mediæval literature would be solved. Thus in the Arthurian part, just as we find additions in Wace to Geoffrey, so we find additions to Wace in Layamon. Where did he get these additions? Was it from the uncertain "Albinus"? Was it, as Celtic enthusiasts hold, that, living as he did on Severn bank, he was a neighbour of Wales, and gathered Welsh tradition? Or was it from deliberate invention? We cannot tell.

Again, we have two distinct versions of his *Brut*, the later of which is fifty years or thereabouts younger than the earlier. It may be said that almost all mediæval work is in similar case. But then the great body of mediæval work is anonymous; and even the most scrupulous ages have not been squeamish in taking liberties with the text of Mr Anon. But the author is named in both these versions, and named differently. In the elder he is Layamon the son of Leovenath, in the younger Laweman the son of Leuca; and though Laweman is a mere variant or translation of Layamon, as much can hardly be said of Leovenath and Leuca. Further, the later version, besides the changes of language which were in the circumstances

[1] Ed. Madden, i. 2.

inevitable, omits many passages, besides those in which it is injured or mutilated, and alters proper names entirely at discretion.

The only explanation of this, though it is an explanation which leaves a good deal unexplained, is, of course, that the sense both of historical criticism and of the duty of one writer to another was hardly born. The curiosity of the Middle Ages was great; their literary faculty, though somewhat incult and infantine, was great likewise: and there were such enormous gaps in their positive knowledge that the sharp sense of division between the certain, the uncertain, and the demonstrably false, which has grown up later, could hardly exist. It seems to have been every man's desire to leave each tale a little richer, fuller, handsomer, than he found it: and in doing this he hesitated neither at the accumulation of separate and sometimes incongruous stories, nor at the insertion of bits and scraps from various sources, nor, it would appear, at the addition of what seemed to him possible or desirable, without troubling himself to examine whether there was any ground for considering it actual.

The form of the Brut.

Secondly, Layamon has no small interest of form. The language in which the *Brut* is written has an exceedingly small admixture of French words; but it has made a step, and a long one, from Anglo-Saxon towards English. The verse is still alliterative, still destitute of any fixed number of syllables or syllabic equivalents. But the alliteration is weak and sometimes not present at all, the lines are of

less extreme lawlessness in point of length than their older Saxon representatives, and, above all, there is a creeping in of rhyme. It is feeble, tentative, and obvious, confined to ostentatious pairs like "brother" and "other," "might" and "right," "fare" and "care." But it is a beginning: and we know that it will spread.

Its substance.

In the last comparison, that of matter, Layamon will not come out ill even if he be tried high. The most obvious trial is with the work of Chrestien de Troyes, his earlier, though not much earlier, contemporary. Here the Frenchman has enormous advantages—the advantage of an infinitely more accomplished scheme of language and metre, that of some two centuries of finished poetical work before him, that of an evidently wider knowledge of literature generally, and perhaps that of a more distinctly poetical genius. And yet Layamon can survive the test. He is less, not more, subject to the *cliché*, the stereotyped and stock poetical form, than Chrestien. If he is far less smooth, he has not the monotony which accompanies and, so to speak, dogs the "skipping octosyllable"; and if he cannot, as Chrestien can, frame a set passage or show-piece, he manages to keep up a diffused interest, and in certain instances—the story of Rouwènne (Rowena), the Tintagel passage, the speech of Walwain to the Emperor of Rome—has a directness and simple appeal which cannot be slighted. We feel that he is at the beginning, while the other in respect of his own division is nearly at the end: that he has future, capabilities, opportunities of de-

velopment. When one reads Chrestien or another earlier contemporary, Benoît de Sainte-More, the question is, "What can come after this?" When one reads Layamon the happier question is, "What will come after this?"

The *Ormulum* and the *Ancren Riwle* appear to be —the former exactly and the latter nearly of the same date as Layamon, all being near to 1200. But though they were "good books," their interest is by no means merely one of edification. That of the *Ormulum*[1] is, indeed, almost entirely confined to its form and language; but it so happens that this interest is of the kind that touches literature most nearly. Orm or Ormin, who gives us his name, but of whom nothing else is known, has left in ten thousand long lines or twenty thousand short couplets a part only of a vast scheme of paraphrase and homiletic commentary on the Four Gospels (the "four-in-hand of Aminadab," as he calls them, taking up an earlier conceit), on the plan of taking a text for each day from its gospel in the calendar. As we have only thirty-two of these divisions, it is clear that the work, if completed, was much larger than this. Orm addresses it to Walter, his brother in the flesh as well as spiritually: the book seems to be written in an Anglian or East Anglian dialect, and it is at least an odd coincidence that the names Orm and Walter occur together in a Durham MS. But whoever Orm or Ormin was, he did two very remarkable things. In the first place, he broke entirely with alliteration and

The Ormulum. *Its metre.*

[1] Ed. White and Holt, 2 vols. Oxford, 1878.

with any-length lines, composing his poem in a metre which is either a fifteen-syllabled iambic tetrameter catalectic, or else, as the reader pleases, a series of distichs in iambic dimeters, alternately acatalectic and catalectic. He does not rhyme, but his work, in the couplet form which shows it best, exhibits occasionally the alternation of masculine and feminine endings. This latter peculiarity was not to take hold in the language; but the quantified or mainly syllabic arrangement was. It was natural that Ormin, greatly daring, and being almost the first to dare, should neither allow himself the principle of equivalence shortly to distinguish English prosody from the French, which, with Latin, he imitated, nor should further hamper his already difficult task with rhyme. But his innovation was great enough, and his name deserves—little positive poetry as there is in his own book—high rank in the hierarchy of British poets. But for him and others like him that magnificent mixed harmony, which English almost alone of languages possesses, which distinguishes it as much from the rigid syllabic bondage of French as from the loose jangle of merely alliterative and accentual verse, would not have come in, or would have come in later. We might have had Langland, but we should not have had Chaucer: we should have had to console ourselves for the loss of Surrey and Wyatt with ingenious extravagances like Gawain Douglas's Eighth Prologue; and it is even possible that when the reaction did come, as it must have come sooner or later, we might have been bound like the French by the rigid syllable which

Orm himself adopted, but which in those early days only served to guide and not to fetter.

Its spelling.

His second important peculiarity shows that he must have been an odd and crotchety creature, but one with sense in his crotchets. He seems to have been annoyed by mispronunciation of his own and other work: and accordingly he adopts (with full warning and explanation) the plan of invariably doubling the consonant after every *short* vowel without exception. This gives a most grotesque air to his pages, which are studded with words like "nemmnedd" (named), "forrwerrpenn" (to despise), "tunderrstanndenn" (to understand), and so forth. But, in the first place, it fixes for all time, in a most invaluable manner, the pronunciation of English at that time; and in the second, it shows that Orm had a sound understanding of that principle of English which has been set at nought by those who would spell "traveller" "traveler." He knew that the tendency, and the, if not warned, excusable tendency, of an English tongue would be to pronounce this trav*ee*ler. It is a pity that knowledge which existed in the twelfth century should apparently have become partial ignorance close to the beginning of the twentieth.

The *Ancren Riwle*[1] has no oddities of this kind, and nothing particularly noticeable in its form, though its easy pleasant prose would have been wonderful at the

[1] Ed. Morton, for the Camden Society. London, 1853. This edition is, I believe, not regarded as quite satisfactory by philology: it is amply adequate for literature.

time in any other European nation. Even French prose was only just beginning to take such form, and had not yet severed itself from poetic peculiarities to anything like the same extent. But then the unknown author of the *Ancren Riwle* had certainly four or five, and perhaps more, centuries of good sound Saxon prose before him: while St Bernard (if he wrote French prose), and even Villehardouin, had little or nothing but Latin. I have called him unknown, and he neither names himself nor is authoritatively named by any one; while of the guesses respecting him, that which identifies him with Simon of Ghent is refuted by the language of the book, while that which assigns it to Bishop Poore has no foundation. But if we do not know who wrote the book, we know for whom it was written—to wit, for the three "anchoresses" or irregular nuns of a private convent or sisterhood at Tarrant Keynes in Dorsetshire.

The Ancren Riwle.

Later this nunnery, which lasted till the dissolution, was taken under the Cistercian rule; but at first, and at the time of the book, it was free, the author advising the inmates, if anybody asked, to say that they were under "the rule of St James"—*i.e.*, the famous definition, by that apostle, of pure religion and undefiled. The treatise, which describes itself, or is described in one of its MSS., as "one book to-dealed into eight books," is of some length, but singularly pleasing to read, and gives evidence of a very amiable and sensible spirit in its author, as well as of a pretty talent for writing easy prose. If he never rises to the more mystical and poetical beauties of mediæval reli-

gion, so he never descends to its ferocities and its puerilities. The rule, the "lady-rule," he says, is the inward; the outward is only adopted in order to assist and help the inward: therefore it may and should vary according to the individual, while the inward cannot. The outward rule of the anchoresses of Tarrant Keynes was by no means rigorous. They were three in number; they had lay sisters (practically lady's-maids) as well as inferior servants. They are not to reduce themselves to bread-and-water fasting without special direction; they are not to be ostentatious in almsgiving; they may have a pet cat; haircloth and hedgehog-skins are not for them; and they are not to flog themselves with briars or leaded thongs. Ornaments are not to be worn; but a note says that this is not a positive command, all such things belonging merely to the external rule. Also they may wash just as often as it is necessary, or as they like!—an item which, absurd as is the popular notion of the dirt of the Middle Ages, speaks volumes for the sense and taste of this excellent anonym.

This part is the last or eighth "dole," as the sections are termed; the remaining seven deal with religious service, private devotion, the *Wesen* or nature of anchorites, temptation, confession, penance, penitence, and the love of God. Although some may think it out of fashion, it is astonishing how much sense, kindliness, true religion, and useful learning there is in this monitor of the anchoresses of Tarrant Keynes, which place a man might well visit in pil-

grimage to do him honour. Every now and then, rough as is his vehicle of speech—a transition medium, endowed neither with the oak-and-rock strength of Anglo-Saxon nor with the varied gifts of modern English—he can rise to real and true eloquence, as where he speaks of the soul and "the heavy flesh that draweth her downwards, yet through the highship [nobleness] of her, it [the flesh] shall become full light—yea, lighter than the wind is, and brighter than the sun is, if only it follow her and draw her not too hard to its own low kind." But though such passages, good in phrase and rhythm, as well as noble in sense, are not rare, the pleasant humanity of the whole book is the best thing in it. M. Renan oddly enough pronounced *Ecclesiastes*, that voice of the doom of life, to be "le seul livre aimable" which Judaism had produced. The ages of St Francis and of the *Imitation* do not compel us to look about for a *seul livre aimable*, but it may safely be said that there is none more amiable in a cheerful human way than the *Ancren Riwle*.

It would serve no purpose here to discuss in detail most of the other vernacular productions of the first half of the thirteenth century in English.[1] They are almost without exception either religious—the constant rehandling of the time cannot be better exem-

[1] Substantial portions of all the work mentioned in this chapter will be found in Messrs Morris and Skeat's invaluable *Specimens of Early English* (Oxford, Part i. ed. 2, 1887; Part ii. ed. 3, 1894). These include the whole of the *Moral Ode* and of *King Horn*. Separate complete editions of some are noted below.

plified than by the fact that at least two paraphrases, one in prose, one in verse, of one of the "doles" of the *Ancren Riwle* itself exist—or else moral-scientific, such as the *Bestiary*,[1] so often printed. One of the constantly recurring version-paraphrases of the Scriptures, however—the so-called *Story of Genesis and Exodus*,[2] supposed to date from about the middle—has great interest, because here we find (whether for the first time or not he would be a rash man who should say, but certainly for almost, if not quite, the first) the famous "Christabel" metre—iambic dimeter, rhymed with a wide licence of trisyllabic equivalence. This was to be twice revived by great poets, with immense consequences to English poetry—first by Spenser in the *Kalendar*, and then by Coleridge himself—and was to become one of the most powerful, varied, and charming of English rhythms. That this metre, the chief battle-ground of fighting between the accent-men and the quantity-men, never arose till after rhymed quantitative metre had met accentual alliteration, and had to a great extent overcome it, is a tell-tale fact, of which more hereafter. And it is to be observed also that in this same poem it is possible to discover not a few very complete and handsome decasyllables which would do no discredit to Chaucer himself.

But the *Owl and the Nightingale*[3] is another kind

[1] Wright, *Reliquiæ Antiquæ*, i. 208-227.

[2] Ed. Morris, E.E.T.S., London, 1865.

[3] About 600 lines of this are given by Morris and Skeat. Completely edited by (among others) F. H. Stratmann. Krefeld 1868.

of thing. In the first place, it appears to be (though it would be rash to affirm this positively of anything in a form so popular with the French *trouvères* as the *débat*) original and not translated. It bears a name, that of Nicholas of Guildford, who seems to be the author, and assigns himself a local habitation at Portesham in Dorsetshire. Although of considerable length (nearly two thousand lines), and written in very pure English with few French words, it manages the rhymed octosyllabic couplet (which by this time had become the standing metre of France for everything but historical poems, and for some of these) with remarkable precision, lightness, and harmony. Moreover, the Owl and the Nightingale conduct their debate with plenty of mother-wit, expressed not unfrequently in proverbial form. Indeed proverbs, a favourite form of expression with Englishmen at all times, appear to have been specially in favour just then; and the "Proverbs of Alfred"[1] (supposed to date from this very time), the "Proverbs of Hendyng"[2] a little later, are not likely to have been the only collections of the kind. The Alfred Proverbs are in a rude popular metre like the old alliteration much broken down; those of Hendyng in a six-line stanza (soon to become the famous ballad stanza) syllabled, though sometimes catalectically, 8 8 6 8 8 6, and rhymed *a a b c c b*, the proverb and the *coda* "quod Hendyng" being added

The Owl and the Nightingale.

Proverbs.

[1] Ed. Morris, *An Old English Miscellany.* London, 1872.

[2] See *Reliquiæ Antiquæ*, i. 109-116.

to each. The *Owl and the Nightingale* is, however, as we might expect, superior to both of these in poetical merit, as well as to the so-called *Moral Ode* which, printed by Hickes in 1705, was one of the first Middle English poems to gain modern recognition.

Robert of Gloucester.

As the dividing-point of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries approaches, the interest of literary work increases, and requires less and less allowance of historical and accidental value. This allowance, indeed, is still necessary with the verse chronicle of Robert of Gloucester,[1] the date of which is fixed with sufficient certainty at 1298. This book has been somewhat undervalued, in point of strict literary merit, from a cause rather ludicrous but still real. It will almost invariably be found that those mediæval books which happen to have been made known before the formal beginning of scholarship in the modern languages, are underrated by modern scholars, who not unnaturally put a perhaps excessive price upon their own discoveries or fosterlings. Robert of Gloucester's work, with the later but companion Englishing of Peter of Langtoft by Robert Manning of Brunne, was published by Hearne in the early part of the last century. The contemporaries of that publication thought him rude, unkempt, "Gothick": the moderns have usually passed him by for more direct *protégés* of their own. Yet there is not a little attraction in Robert. To begin with, he is the first in English, if not the first in any modern

[1] Edited with Langtoft, in 4 vols., by Hearne, Oxford, 1724; and reprinted, London, 1810. Also more lately in the Rolls Series.

language, to attempt in the vernacular a general history, old as well as new, new as well as old. And the opening of him is not to be despised—

> "Engeland is a well good land, I ween of each land the best,
> Yset in the end of the world, as all in the West:
> The sea goeth him all about, he stands as an isle,
> His foes he dares the less doubt but it be through guile
> Of folk of the self land, as men hath y-seen while."

And in the same good swinging metre he goes on describing the land, praising its gifts, and telling its story in a downright fashion which is very agreeable to right tastes. Like almost everybody else, he drew upon Geoffrey of Monmouth for his early history: but from at least the time of the Conqueror (he is strongly prejudiced in the matter of Harold) he represents, if not what we should call solid historical knowledge, at any rate direct, and for the time tolerably fresh, historical tradition, while as he approaches his own time he becomes positively historical, and, as in the case of the Oxford town-and-gown row of 1263, the first Barons' Wars, the death of the Earl-Marshal, and such things, is a vigorous as well as a tolerably authoritative chronicler. In the history of English prosody he, too, is of great importance, being another landmark in the process of consolidating accent and quantity, alliteration and rhyme. His swinging verses still have the older tendency to a trochaic rather than the later to an anapæstic rhythm; but they are, so to speak, on the move, and approaching the later form. He is still rather prone to group his rhymes instead of keeping the couplets separate: but

as he is not translating from *chanson de geste* form, he does not, as Robert of Brunne sometimes does, fall into complete *laisses*. I have counted as many as twenty continuous rhymes in Manning, and there may be more: but there is nothing of that extent in the earlier Robert.

Verse history, however, must always be an awkward and unnatural form at the best. The end of the thirteenth century had something better to show in the appearance of romance proper and of epic. When the study of any department of old literature begins, there is a natural and almost invariable tendency to regard it as older than it really is; and when, at the end of the last century, the English verse romances began to be read, this tendency prevailed at least as much as usual. Later investigation, besides showing that, almost without exception, they are adaptations of French originals, has, partly as a consequence of this, shown that scarcely any that we have are earlier than the extreme end of the thirteenth century. Among these few that are, however, three of exceptional interest (perhaps the best three except *Gawaine and the Green Knight* and *Sir Launfal*) may probably be classed — to wit, *Horn*, *Havelok*, and the famous *Sir Tristram*. As to the last and best known of these, which from its inclusion among Sir Walter Scott's works has received attention denied to the rest, it may or may not be the work of Thomas the Rhymer. But whether it is or not, it can by no possibility be later than the first quarter of the fourteenth century, while the most cautious critics

Romances.

pronounce both *Havelok the Dane* and *King Horn* to be older than 1300.[1]

It is, moreover, not a mere accident that these three, though the authors pretty certainly had French originals before them, seem most likely to have had yet older English or Anglo-Saxon originals of the French in the case of *Horn* and *Havelok*, while the Tristram story, as is pointed out in the chapter on the Arthurian Legend, is the most British in tone of all the divisions of that Legend. *Havelok* and *Horn* have yet further interest because of the curious contrast between their oldest forms in more ways than one. *Havelok* is an English equivalent, with extremely strong local connections and identifications, of the homelier passages of the French *chansons de geste*. The hero, born in Denmark, and orphan heir to a kingdom, is to be put away by his treacherous guardian, who commits him to Grim the fisherman to be drowned. Havelok's treatment is hard enough even on his way to the drowning; but as supernatural signs show his kingship to Grim's wife, and as the fisherman, feigning to have performed his task, meets with very scant gratitude from his employer, he resolves to escape from the latter's power, puts to sea, and lands in England at the place afterwards to be called from him Grimsby. Havelok is brought up simply as a rough fisher-boy; but he obtains employ-

Havelok the Dane.

[1] *Tristram*, for editions *v.* p. 116: *Havelok*, edited by Madden, 1828, and again by Prof. Skeat, E.E.T.S., 1868. *King Horn* has been repeatedly printed—first by Ritson, *Ancient English Metrical Romances* (London, 1802), ii. 91, and Appendix; last by Prof. Skeat in the *Specimens* above mentioned.

ment in Lincoln Castle as porter to the kitchen, and much rough horse-play of the *chanson* kind occurs. Now it so happens that the heiress of England, Goldborough, has been treated by her guardian with as much injustice though with less ferocity; and the traitor seeks to crown his exclusion of her from her rights by marrying her to the sturdy scullion. When the two rights are thus joined, they of course prevail, and the two traitors, after a due amount of hard fighting, receive their doom, Godard the Dane being hanged, and Godric the Englishman burnt at the stake. This rough and vigorous story is told in rough and vigorous verse—octosyllabic couplets, with full licence in shortening, but with no additional syllables except an occasional double rhyme—in very sterling English, and with some, though slight, traces of alliteration.

King Horn.

Horn (*King Horn, Horn-Child and Maiden Rimnilde,* &c.) is somewhat more courtly in its general outlines, and has less of the folk-tale about it; but it also has connections with Denmark, and it turns upon treachery, as indeed do nearly all the romances. Horn, son of a certain King Murray, is, in consequence of a raid of heathen in ships, orphaned and exiled in his childhood across the sea, where he finds an asylum in the house of King Aylmer of Westerness. His love for Aylmer's daughter Rimenhild and hers for him (he is the most beautiful of men), the faithfulness of his friend Athulf (who has to undergo the very trying experience of being made violent love to by Rimenhild under the

impression that he is Horn), and the treachery of his friend Fikenild (who nearly succeeds in making the princess his own), defray the chief interest of the story, which is not very long. The good steward Athelbrus also plays a great part, which is noticeable, because the stewards of Romances are generally bad. The rhymed couplets of this poem are composed of shorter lines than those of *Havelok*. They allow themselves the syllabic licence of alliterative verse proper, though there is even less alliteration than in *Havelok*, and they vary from five to eight syllables, though five and six are the commonest. The poem, indeed, in this respect occupies a rather peculiar position. Yet it is all the more valuable as showing yet another phase of the change.

The first really charming literature in English has, however, still to be mentioned: and this is to be found in the volume—little more than a pamphlet—edited fifty years ago for the Percy Society (March 1, 1842) by Thomas Wright, under the title of *Specimens of Lyric Poetry composed in England in the Reign of Edward the First*, from MS. 2253 Harl. in the British Museum. The first three poems are in French, of the well-known and by this time far from novel *trouvère* character, of which those of Thibaut of Champagne are the best specimens. The fourth—

"Middel-erd for mon wes mad,"

is English, and is interesting as copying not the least intricate of the *trouvère* measures — an eleven-line stanza of eight sevens or sixes, rhymed *ab, ab,*

ab, ab, c, b, c; but moral-religious in tone and much alliterated. The fifth, also English, is anapæstic tetrameter heavily alliterated, and mono-rhymed for eight verses, with the stanza made up to ten by a couplet on another rhyme. It is not very interesting. But with VI. the chorus of sweet sounds begins, and therefore, small as is the room for extract here, it must be given in full:—

"Bytuene Mershe and Avoril
When spray beginneth to springe,
The little foul hath hire wyl
On hyre lud to synge:
Ich libbe in love-longinge
For semlokest of alle thynge,
He may me blisse bringe
Icham in hire banndoun.
An hendy hap ichabbe y-hent,
Ichot from hevine it is me sent,
From alle wymmen my love is lent
Ant lyht on Alisoun.

On hew hire her is fayr ynoh
Hire browe bronne, hire eye blake;
With lovsom chere he on me loh;
With middel small ant wel y-make;
Bott he me wille to hire take,
For to buen hire owen make,
Long to lyven ichulle forsake,
Ant feye fallen a-doun.
An hendy hap, &c.

Nihtes when I wenke ant wake,
For-thi myn wonges waxeth won;
Levedi, al for thine sake
Longinge is ylent me on.

In world is non so wytor mon
That al hire bounté telle con ;
Heir swyre is whittere than the swon
Ant fayrest may in toune.
An hendy hap, &c.

Icham for wouyng al for-wake,
Wery so water in wore
Lest any reve me my make
Ychabbe y-ȝyrned ȝore.
Betere is tholien whyle sore
Then mournen evermore.
Geynest under gore,
Herkene to my roune.
An hendy hap, &c."

The next, "With longyng y am lad," is pretty, though less so: and is in ten-line stanzas of sixes, rhymed *a a b, a a b, b a a b.* Those of VIII. are twelve-lined in eights, rhymed *ab, ab, ab, ab, c, d, c, d;* but it is observable that there is some assonance here instead of pure rhyme. IX. is in the famous romance stanza of six or rather twelve lines, *à la Sir Thopas*; X. in octaves of eights alternately rhymed with an envoy quatrain; XI. (a very pretty one) in a new metre, rhymed *a a a b a, b.* And this variety continues after a fashion which it would be tedious to particularise further. But it must be said that the charm of "Alison" is fully caught up by—

"Lenten ys come with love to toune,
With blosmen ant with bryddes roune,
That al this blisse bringeth ;
Dayes-eyes in this dales,
Notes suete of nytengales,
Ilk foul song singeth ;"

by a sturdy Praise of Women which charges gallantly against the usual mediæval slanders; and by a piece which, with "Alison," is the flower of the whole, and has the exquisite refrain—

> "Blow, northerne wynd,
> Send thou me my suetyng,
> Blow, northerne wynd, blou, blou, blou"—

Here is Tennysonian verse five hundred years before Tennyson. The "cry" of English lyric is on this northern wind at last; and it shall never fail afterwards.

The prosody of the modern languages.

This seems to be the best place to deal, not merely with the form of English lyric in itself, but with the general subject of the prosody as well of English as of the other modern literary languages. A very great[1] deal has been written, with more and with less learning, with ingenuity greater or smaller, on the origins of rhyme, on the source of the decasyllabic and other staple lines and stanzas; and, lastly, on the general system of modern as opposed to ancient scansion. Much of this has been the result of really careful study, and not a little of it the result of distinct acuteness; but it has suffered on the whole from the supposed need of some new theory, and from an unwillingness to

[1] It is sufficient to mention here Guest's famous *English Rhythms* (ed. Skeat, 1882), a book which at its first appearance in 1838 was no doubt a revelation, but which carries things too far; Dr Schipper's *Grundriss der Englischen Metrik* (Wien, 1895), and for foreign matters M. Gaston Paris's chapter in his *Littérature Française au Moyen Age*. I do not agree with any of them, but I have a profound respect for all.

accept plain and obvious facts. These facts, or the most important of them, may be summarised as follows: The prosody of a language will necessarily vary according to the pronunciation and composition of that language; but there are certain general principles of prosody which govern all languages possessing a certain kinship. These general principles were, for the Western branches of the Aryan tongues, very early discovered and formulated by the Greeks, being later adjusted to somewhat stiffer rules — to compensate for less force of poetic genius, or perhaps merely because licence was not required—by the Latins. Towards the end of the classical literary period, however, partly the increasing importance of the Germanic and other non-Greek and non-Latin elements in the Empire, partly those inexplicable organic changes which come from time to time, broke up this system. Rhyme appeared, no one knows quite how, or why, or whence, and at the same time, though the general structure of metres was not very much altered, the quantity of individual syllables appears to have undergone a complete change. Although metres quantitative in scheme continued to be written, they were written, as a rule, with more or less laxity; and though rhyme was sometimes adapted to them in Latin, it was more frequently used with a looser syllabic arrangement, retaining the divisional characteristics of the older prosody, but neglecting quantity, the strict rules of elision, and so forth.

Historical retrospect.

On the other hand, some of the new Teutonic

tongues which were thus brought into contact with Latin, and with which Latin was brought into contact, had systems of prosody of their own, based on entirely different principles. The most elaborate of these probably, and the only one from which we have distinct remains of undoubtedly old matter in considerable quantities, is Anglo-Saxon, though Icelandic runs it close. A detailed account of the peculiarities of this belongs to the previous volume: it is sufficient to say here that its great characteristic was alliteration, and that accent played a large part, to the exclusion both of definite quantity and of syllabic identity or equivalence.

Anglo-Saxon prosody.

While these were the states of things with regard to Latin on the one hand, and to the tongues most separated from Latin on the other, the Romance languages, or daughters of Latin, had elaborated or were elaborating, by stages which are almost entirely hidden from us, middle systems, of which the earliest, and in a way the most perfect, is that of Provençal, followed by Northern French and Italian, the dialects of the Spanish Peninsula being a little behindhand in elaborate verse. The three first-named tongues seem to have hit upon the verse of ten or eleven syllables, which later crystallised itself into ten for French and eleven for Italian, as their staple measure.[1] Efforts have been made to father this directly on some classical original, and some authorities have even been uncritical enough to speak of the connection—this or that—having been "proved"

Romance prosody.

[1] *Vide* Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquio.*

for these verses or others. No such proof has been given, and none is possible. What is certain, and alone certain, is that whereas the chief literary metre of the last five centuries of Latin had been dactylic and trisyllabic, this, the chief metre of the daughter tongues, and by-and-by almost their only one, was disyllabic—iambic, or trochaic, as the case may be, but generally iambic. Rhyme became by degrees an invariable or almost invariable accompaniment, and while quantity, strictly speaking, almost disappeared (some will have it that it quite disappeared from French), a syllabic uniformity more rigid than any which had prevailed, except in the case of lyric measures like the Alcaic, became the rule. Even elision was very greatly restricted, though cæsura was pretty strictly retained, and an additional servitude was imposed by the early adoption in French of the fixed alternation of "masculine" and "feminine" rhymes—that is to say, of rhymes with, and rhymes without, the mute *e*.

English prosody.

But the prosody of the Romance tongues is perfectly simple and intelligible, except in the one crux of the question how it came into being, and what part "popular" poetry played in it. We find it, almost from the first, full-blown: and only minor refinements or improvements are introduced afterwards. With English prosody it is very different.[1] As has been said, the older prosody itself, with

[1] What is said here of English applies with certain modifications to German, though the almost entire loss of Old German poetry and the comparatively late date of Middle make the process less striking and

the older verse, seems to have to a great extent died out even before the Conquest, and what verse was written in the alliterative measures afterwards was of a feeble and halting kind. Even when, as the authors of later volumes of this series will have to show, alliterative verse was taken up with something like a set purpose during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, its character was wholly changed, and though some very good work was written in it, it was practically all literary exercise. It frequently assumed regular stanza-forms, the lines also frequently fell into regular quantitative shapes, such as the heroic, the Alexandrine, and the tetrameter. Above all, the old strict and accurate combination of a limited amount of alliteration, jealously adjusted to words important in sense and rhythm, was exchanged for a profusion of alliterated syllables, often with no direct rhythmical duty to pay, and constantly leading to mere senseless and tasteless jingle, if not to the positive coining of fantastic or improper locutions to get the "artful aid."

The later alliteration.

Meanwhile the real prosody of English had been elaborated, in the usual blending fashion of the race, by an intricate, yet, as it happens, an easily traceable series of compromises and naturalisations. By the end of the twelfth century, as

The new verse.

more obscure, and the greater talent of the individual imitators of French interferes more with the process of insensible shaping and growth. German prosody, despite the charm of its lyric measures, has never acquired the perfect combination of freedom and order which we find in English, as may be seen by comparing the best blank verse of the two.

we have seen, rhyme was creeping in to supersede alliteration, and a regular arrangement of elastic syllabic equivalents or strict syllabic values was taking the place of the irregular accented lengths. It does not appear that the study of the classics had anything directly to do with this: it is practically certain that the influence on the one hand of Latin hymns and the Church services, and on the other of French poetry, had very much.

Rhyme and syllabic equivalence.

Rhyme is to the modern European ear so agreeable, if not so indispensable, an ornament of verse, that, once heard, it is sure to creep in, and can only be expelled by deliberate and unnatural crotchet from any but narrative and dramatic poetry. On the other hand, it is almost inevitable that when rhyme is expected, the lines which it tips should be reduced to an equal or at any rate an equivalent length. Otherwise the expectation of the ear—that the final ring should be led up to by regular and equable rhythm—is baulked. If this is not done, as in what we call doggerel rhyme, an effect of grotesque is universally produced, to the ruin of serious poetic effect. With these desiderata present, though unconsciously present, before them, with the Latin hymn-writers and the French poets for models, and with Church music perpetually starting in their memories cadences, iambic or trochaic, dactylic or anapæstic, to which to set their own verse, it is not surprising that English poets should have accompanied the rapid changes of their language itself with parallel rapidity of metrical innovation. Quantity they observed loosely

—quantity in modern languages is always loose: but it does not follow that they ignored it altogether.

Those who insist that they did ignore it, and who painfully search for verses of so many "accents," for "sections," for "pauses," and what not, are confronted with difficulties throughout the whole course of English poetry: there is hardly a page of that brilliant, learned, instructive, invaluable piece of wrong-headedness, Dr Guest's *English Rhythms*, which does not bristle with them. But at no time are these difficulties so great as during our present period, and especially at the close of it. Let any man who has no "prize to fight," no thesis to defend, take any characteristic piece of Anglo-Saxon poetry and "Alison," place them side by side, read them aloud together, scan them carefully with the eye, compare each separately and both together with as many other examples of poetic arrangement as he likes. He must, I think, be hopelessly blinded by prejudice if he does not come to the conclusion that there is a gulf between the systems of which these two poems are examples—that if the first is "accentual," "sectional," and what not, then these same words are exactly *not* the words which ought to be applied to the second.[1] And he will further see that with "Alison" there is not the slightest difficulty whatever, but that, on the contrary, it is the natural and all but inevitable thing

Accent and quantity.

[1] Of course there is plenty of alliteration in "Alison." That ornament is too grateful to the English ear ever to have ceased or to be likely to cease out of English poetry. But it has ceased to possess any *metrical* value; it has absolutely nothing to do with the *structure* of the line.

to do to scan the piece according to classical laws, allowing only much more licence of "common" syllables—common in themselves and by position—than in Latin, and rather more than in Greek.

The gain of form.

Yet another conclusion may perhaps be risked, and that is that this change of prosody was either directly caused by, or in singular coincidence was associated with, a great enlargement of the range and no slight improvement of the quality of poetry. Anglo-Saxon verse at its best has grandeur, mystery, force, a certain kind of pathos. But it is almost entirely devoid of sweetness, of all the lighter artistic attractions, of power to represent other than religious passion, of adaptability to the varied uses of lyric. All these additional gifts, and in no slight measure, have now been given; and there is surely an almost fanatical hatred of form in the refusal to connect the gain with those changes, in vocabulary first, in prosody secondly, which have been noted. For there is not only the fact, but there is a more than plausible reason for the fact. The alliterative accentual verse of indefinite length is obviously unsuited for all the lighter, and for some of the more serious, purposes of verse. Unless it is at really heroic height (and at this height not even Shakespeare can keep poetry invariably) it must necessarily be flat, awkward, prosaic, heavy, all which qualities are the worst foes of the Muses. The new equipments may not have been indispensable to the poet's soaring—they may not be the greater wings of his song, the mighty pinions that take him beyond Space and

Time into Eternity and the Infinite. But they are most admirable *talaria*, ankle-winglets enabling him to skim and scud, to direct his flight this way and that, to hover as well as to tower, even to run at need as well as to fly.

That a danger was at hand, the danger of too great restriction in the syllabic direction, has been admitted. The greatest poet of the fourteenth century in England —the greatest, for the matter of that, from the beginning till the sixteenth—went some way in this path, and if Chaucer's English followers had been men of genius we might have been sorely trammelled. Fortunately Lydgate and Occleve and Hawes showed the dangers rather than the attractions of strictness, and the contemporary practice of alliterative irregulars kept alive the appetite for liberty. But at this time —at our time—it was restriction, regulation, quantification, metrical arrangement, that English needed; and it received them.

The "accent" theory.

These remarks are of course not presented as a complete account, even in summary, of English, much less of European prosody. They are barely more than the heads of such a summary, or than indications of the line which the inquiry might, and in the author's view should, take. Perhaps they may be worked out—or rather the working out of them may be published—more fully hereafter. But for the present they may possibly be useful as a protest against the "accent" and "stress" theories which have been so common of late years in regard

to English poetry, and which, though not capable of being applied in quite the same fashion to the Romance languages, have had their counterparts in attempts to decry the application of classical prosody (which has never been very well understood on the Continent) to modern tongues. No one can speak otherwise than respectfully of Dr Guest, whose book is certainly one of the most patient and ingenious studies of the kind to be found in any literature, and whose erudition, at a time when such erudition needed far greater efforts than now, cannot be too highly praised. But it is a besetting sin or disease of Englishmen in all matters, after pooh-poohing innovation, to go blindly in for it; and I cannot but think that Dr Guest's accentual theory, after being for years mainly neglected, has, for years again, been altogether too greedily swallowed. It is not of course a case necessarily of want of scholarship, or want of ear, for there are few better scholars or poets than Mr Robert Bridges, who, though not a mere Guestite, holds theories of prosody which seem to me even less defensible than Guest's. But it is, I think, a case of rather misguided patriotism, which thinks it necessary to invent an English prosody for English poems.

Initial fallacies.

This is surely a mistake. Allowances in degree, in shade, in local colour, there must of course be in prosody as in other things. The developments, typical and special, of English prosody in the nineteenth century cannot be quite the same as those of Greek two thousand years ago,

or of French to-day. But if, as I see not the slightest reason for doubting, prosody is not an artificially acquired art but a natural result of the natural desires, the universal organs of humanity, it is excessively improbable that the prosodic results of nations so nearly allied to each other, and so constantly studying each other's work, as Greeks, Romans, and modern Europeans, should be in any great degree different. If quantity, if syllabic equivalence and so forth, do not display themselves in Anglo-Saxon or in Icelandic, it must be remembered that the poetry of these nations was after all comparatively small, rather isolated, and in the conditions of extremely early development—a childish thing to which there is not the slightest rhyme or reason for straining ourselves to assimilate the things of manhood. That accent modified English prosody nobody need deny; there is no doubt that the very great freedom of equivalence—which makes it, for instance, at least theoretically possible to compose an English heroic line of five tribrachs—and the immense predominance of common syllables in the language, are due in some degree to a continuance of accentual influence.

And final perversities thereof.

But to go on from this, as Dr Guest and some of his followers have done, to the subjection of the whole invaluable vocabulary of classical prosody to a sort of *præmunire*, to hold up the hands in horror at the very name of a tribrach, and exhibit symptoms of catalepsy at the word catalectic—to ransack the dictionary for unnatural words or

uses of words like "catch," and "stop," and "pause," where a perfectly clear and perfectly flexible terminology is ready to your hand—this does seem to me in another sense a very childish thing indeed, and one that cannot be too soon put away. It is no exaggeration to say that the extravagances, the unnatural contortions of scansion, the imputations of irregularity and impropriety on the very greatest poets with which Dr Guest's book swarms, must force themselves on any one who studies that book thoroughly and impartially. When theory leads to the magisterial indorsement of "gross fault" on some of the finest passages of Shakespeare and Milton, because they "violate" Dr Guest's privy law of "the final pause"; when we are told that "section 9," as Dr Guest is pleased to call that admirable form of "sixes," the anapæst followed by two iambs,[1] one of the great sources of music in the ballad metre, is "a verse which has very little to recommend it"; when one of Shakespeare's secrets, the majestic full stop before the last word of the line, is black-marked as "opposed to every principle of accentual rhythm," then the thing becomes not so much outrageous as absurd. Prosody respectfully and intelligently attempting to explain how the poets produce their best things is useful and agreeable: when it makes an arbitrary

[1] His instance is Burns's—

"Like a rogue | for for | gerie."

It is a pity he did not reinforce it with many of the finest lines in *The Ancient Mariner*.

theory beforehand, and dismisses the best things as bad because they do not agree therewith, it becomes a futile nuisance. And I believe that there is no period of our literature which, when studied, will do more to prevent or correct such fatuity than this very period of Early Middle English.

CHAPTER VI.

MIDDLE HIGH GERMAN POETRY.

POSITION OF GERMANY — MERIT OF ITS POETRY — FOLK-EPICS: THE 'NIBELUNGENLIED'—THE 'VOLSUNGA SAGA'—THE GERMAN VERSION — METRES — RHYME AND LANGUAGE — 'KUDRUN' — SHORTER NATIONAL EPICS—LITERARY POETRY—ITS FOUR CHIEF MASTERS—EXCELLENCE, BOTH NATURAL AND ACQUIRED, OF GERMAN VERSE—ORIGINALITY OF ITS ADAPTATION—THE PIONEERS: HEINRICH VON VELDEKE — GOTTFRIED OF STRASBURG — HARTMANN VON AUE — 'EREC DER WANDERÆRE' AND 'IWEIN'—LYRICS—THE "BOOKLETS" —'DER ARME HEINRICH'—WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH—'TITUREL' —'WILLEHALM'—'PARZIVAL'—WALTHER VON DER VOGELWEIDE—PERSONALITY OF THE POETS—THE MINNESINGERS GENERALLY.

Position of Germany.

It must have been already noticed that one main reason for the unsurpassed literary interest of this present period is that almost all the principal European nations contribute, in their different ways, elements to that interest. The contribution is not in all cases one of positive literary production, of so much matter of the first value actually added to the world's library. But in some cases it is; and in the instance to which we come at present it is so in a measure approached by no other country ex-

cept France and perhaps Iceland. Nor is Germany,[1] as every other country except Iceland may be said to be, wholly a debtor or vassal to France herself. Partly she is so; of the three chief divisions of Middle High German poetry (for prose here practically does not count), the folk-epic, the "art-epic," as the Germans themselves not very happily call it, and the lyric—the second is always, and the third to no small extent, what might punningly be called in copyhold of France. But even the borrowed material is treated with such intense individuality of spirit that it almost acquires independence; and part of the matter, as has been said, is not borrowed at all.

Merit of its poetry.

It has been pointed out that for some curious reason French literary critics, not usually remarkable for lack of national vanity, have been by no means excessive in their laudations of the earlier literature of their country. The opposite is the case with those of Germany, and the rather extravagant patriotism of some of their expressions may perhaps have had a bad effect on some foreign readers. It cannot, for instance, be otherwise than disgusting to even rudimentary critical feeling to be told in the

[1] The most accessible *History of German Literature* is that of Scherer (English translation, 2 vols., Oxford, 1886), a book of fair information and with an excellent bibliography, but not very well arranged, and too full of extra-literary matter. Carlyle's great *Nibelungenlied* Essay (*Essays*, vol. iii.) can never be obsolete save in unimportant matters; that which follows on *Early German Literature* is good, but less good. Mr Gosse's *Northern Studies* (1879) contains a very agreeable paper on Walther von der Vogelweide. The Wagnerites have naturally of late years dealt much with Wolfram von Eschenbach, but seldom from a literary point of view.

same breath that the first period of German literature was "richer in inventive genius than any that followed it," and that "nothing but fragments of a single song[1] remain to us" from this first period—fragments, it may be added, which, though interesting enough, can, in no possible judgment that can be called judgment, rank as in any way first-rate poetry. So, too, the habit of comparing the *Nibelungenlied* to the *Iliad* and *Kudrun* to the *Odyssey* (parallels not far removed from the Thucydides-and-Tennyson order) may excite resentment. But the Middle High German verse of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is in itself of such interest, such variety, such charm, that if only it be approached in itself, and not through the medium of its too officious ushers, its effect on any real taste for poetry is undoubted.

The three divisions above sketched may very well be taken in the order given. The great folk-epics just mentioned, with some smaller poems, such as *König Rother*, are almost invariably anonymous; the translators or adaptors from the French—Gottfried von Strasburg, Hartmann von Aue, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and others—are at least known by name, if we do not know much else about them; and this is also the case with the Lyric poets, especially the best of them, the exquisite singer known as Walter of the Bird-Meadow.

It was inevitable that the whole literary energy of a nation which is commentatorial or nothing, should be flung on such a subject as the *Nibelung-*

[1] *Hildebrand and Hadubrand.*

enlied;[1] the amount of work expended on the subject by Germans during the century in which the poem has been known is enormous, and might cause despair, if happily it were not for the most part negligible. The poem served as a principal ground in the battle—not yet at an end, but now in a more or less languid condition—between the believers in conglomerate epic, the upholders of the theory that long early poems are always a congeries of still earlier ballads or shorter chants, and the advocates of their integral condition. The authorship of the poem, its date, and its relation to previous work or tradition, with all possible excursions and alarums as to sun-myths and so forth, have been discussed *ad nauseam*. Literary history, as here understood, need not concern itself much about such things. It is sufficient to say that the authorship of the *Lied* in its present condition is quite unknown; that its date would appear to be about the centre of our period, or, in other words, not earlier than the middle of the twelfth century or later than the middle of the thirteenth, and that, as far as the subject goes, we undoubtedly have handlings of it in Icelandic (the so-called *Volsunga Saga*), and still earlier verse-dealings in the Elder Edda, which are older, and probably much older, than the German poem.[2] They are not only older, but they

Folk-epics—The Nibelungenlied.

The Volsunga Saga.

[1] Ed. Bartsch. 6th ed. Leipzig, 1886.

[2] For the verse originals see Vigfusson and Powell's *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* (Oxford, 1883), vol. i. The verse and prose alike will be found conveniently translated in a cheap little volume of the "Camelot Library," *The Volsunga Saga*, by W. Morris and E. Magnusson (London, 1888).

are different. As a Volsung story, the interest is centred on the ancestor of Sigurd (Sigfried in the later poem), on his acquisition of the hoard of the dwarf Andvari by slaying the dragon Fafnir, its guardian, and on the tale of his love for the Amazon Brynhild; how by witchcraft he is beguiled to wed instead Gudrun the daughter of Giuki, while Gunnar, Gudrun's brother, marries Brynhild by the assistance of Sigurd himself; how the sisters-in-law quarrel, with the result that Gudrun's brothers slay Sigurd, on whose funeral-pyre Brynhild (having never ceased to love him and wounded herself mortally), is by her own will burnt; and how Gudrun, having married King Atli, Brynhild's brother, achieves vengeance on her own brethren by his means. A sort of *coda* of the story tells of the third marriage of Gudrun to King Jonakr, of the cruel fate of Swanhild, her daughter by Sigurd (who was so fair that when she gazed on the wild horses that were to tread her to death they would not harm her; and her head had to be covered ere they would do their work), of the further fate of Swanhild's half-brothers in their effort to avenge her, and of the final *threnos* and death of Gudrun herself.

The author of the *Nibelungenlied* (or rather the "Nibelungen-*Noth*," for this is the older title of the poem, which has a very inferior sequel called *Die Klage*) has dealt with the story very differently. He pays no attention to the ancestry of Sifrit (Sigurd), and little to his acquisition of the hoard, diminishes the part of Brynhild, stripping it of all romantic interest as regards Sifrit, and very largely increases the

importance of the revenge of Gudrun, now called Kriemhild. Only sixteen of the thirty-nine "aventiuren" or "fyttes" (into which the poem in the edition here used is divided) are allotted to the part up to and including the murder of Sifrit; the remaining twenty-three deal with the vengeance of Kriemhild, who is herself slain just when this vengeance is complete, the after-piece of her third marriage and the fate of Swanhild being thus rendered impossible.

Among the idler parts of Nibelungen discussions perhaps the idlest are the attempts made by partisans of Icelandic and German literature respectively to exalt or depress these two handlings, each in comparison with the other. There is no real question of superiority or inferiority, but only one of difference. The older handling, in the *Volsunga Saga* to some extent, but still more in the Eddaic songs, has perhaps the finer touches of pure clear poetry in single passages and phrases; the story of Sigurd and Brynhild has a passion which is not found in the German version; the defeat of Fafnir and the treacherous Regin is excellent; and the wild and ferocious story of Sinfiötli, with which the saga opens, has unmatched intensity, well brought out in Mr Morris's splendid verse-rendering, *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung*.[1]

The German version.

But every poet has a perfect right to deal with any story as he chooses, if he makes good poetry of it; and the poet of the *Nibelungenlied* is more than justified in this respect. By curtailing the beginning, cutting off the *coda* above mentioned alto-

[1] 4th edition. London, 1887.

gether, and lessening the part and interest of Brynhild, he has lifted Kriemhild to a higher, a more thoroughly expounded, and a more poetical position, and has made her one of the greatest heroines of epic, if not the greatest in all literature. The Gudrun of the Norse story is found supplying the loss of one husband with the gain of another to an extent perfectly consonant with Icelandic ideas, but according to less insular standards distinctly damaging to her interest as a heroine; and in revenging her brothers on Atli, after revenging Sigurd on her brothers by means of Atli, she completely alienates all sympathy except on a ferocious and pedantic theory of blood-revenge. The Kriemhild of the German is quite free from this drawback; and her own death comes just when and as it should — not so much a punishment for the undue bloodthirstiness of her revenge as an artistic close to the situation. There may be too many episodic personages — Dietrich of Bern, for instance, has extremely little to do in this galley. But the strength, thoroughness, and in its own savage way charm of Kriemhild's character, and the incomparable series of battles between the Burgundian princes and Etzel's men in the later cantos—cantos which contain the very best poetical fighting in the history of the world —far more than redeem this. The *Nibelungenlied* is a very great poem; and with *Beowulf* (the oldest, but the least interesting on the whole), *Roland* (the most artistically finished in form), and the *Poem of the Cid* (the cheerfullest and perhaps the fullest of character), composes a quartette of epic with which the

literary story of the great European literary nations most appropriately begins. In bulk, dramatic completeness, and a certain *furia*, the *Nibelungenlied*, though the youngest and probably the least original, is the greatest of the four.

Metres.

The form, though not finished with the perfection of the French decasyllable, is by no means of a very uncouth description. The poem is written in quatrains, rhymed couplet and couplet, not alternately, but evidently intended for quatrains, inasmuch as the sense frequently runs on at the second line, but regularly stops at the fourth. The normal line of which these quatrains are composed is a thirteen-syllabled one divided by a central pause, so that the first half is an iambic dimeter catalectic, and the second an iambic dimeter brachycatalectic.

"Von einer isenstangen : des gie dem helde not."

The first half sometimes varies from this norm, though not very often, the alteration usually taking the form of the loss of the first syllable, so that the half-line consists of three trochees. The second half is much more variable. Sometimes, in the same way as with the first, a syllable is dropped at the opening, and the half-line becomes similarly trochaic. Sometimes there is a double rhyme instead of a single, making seven syllables, though not altering the rhythm ; and sometimes this is extended to a full octosyllable. But this variety by no means results in cacophony or confusion ; the general swing of the metre is well maintained, and maintains itself in turn on the ear.

In the rhymes, as in those of all early rhymed poems, there is a certain monotony. Just as in the probably contemporary Layamon the poet is tempted into rhyme chiefly by such easy opportunities as "other" and "brother," "king" and "thing," so here, though rhyme is the rule, and not, as there, the exception, certain pairs, especially "wip" and "lip" ("wife" and "body"), "sach" and "sprach," "geben" and "geleben," "tot" and "not," recur perhaps a little too often for the ear's perfect comfort. But this is natural and extremely pardonable. The language is exceedingly clear and easy—far nearer to German of the present day than Layamon's own verse, or the prose of the *Ancren Riwle*, is to English prose and verse of the nineteenth century; the differences being, as a rule, rather matters of spelling or phrase than of actual vocabulary. It is very well suited both to the poet's needs and to the subject; there being little or nothing of that stammer—as it may be called—which is not uncommon in mediæval work, as if the writer were trying to find words that he cannot find for a thought which he cannot fully shape even to himself. In short, there is in the particular kind, stage, and degree that accomplishment which distinguishes the greater from the lesser achievements of literature.

Rhyme and language.

Kudrun[1] or *Gudrun*—it is a little curious that this should be the name of the original joint-heroine of the *Nibelungenlied*, of the heroine of one of the finest and most varied of the Icelandic sagas, the *Laxdœla*, and of the present poem—is far

Kudrun.

[1] Ed. Bartsch. 4th ed. Leipzig, 1880.

less known to general students of literature than its companion. Nor can it be said that this comparative neglect is wholly undeserved. It is an interesting poem enough; but neither in story nor in character-interest, in arrangement nor in execution, can it vie with the *Nibelungen*, of which in formal points it has been thought to be a direct imitation. The stanza is much the same, except that there is a much more general tendency to arrange the first couplet in single masculine rhyme and the second in feminine, while the second half of the fourth line is curiously prolonged to either ten or eleven syllables. The first refinement may be an improvement: the second certainly is not, and makes it very difficult to a modern ear to get a satisfactory swing on the verse. The language, moreover (though this is a point on which I speak with some diffidence), has a slightly more archaic cast, as of intended archaism, than is the case with the *Nibelungen*.

As for matter, the poem has the interest, always considerable to English readers, of dealing with the sea, and the shores of the sea; and, like the *Nibelungenlied*, it seems to have had older forms, of which some remains exist in the Norse. But there is less coincidence of story: and the most striking incident in the Norse—an unending battle, where the combatants, killed every night, come alive again every day—is in the German a merely ordinary "battle of Wulpensand," where one side has the worst, and cloisters are founded for the repose of the dead. On the other hand, *Kudrun*, while rationalised in some respects

and Christianised in others, has the extravagance, not so much primitive as carelessly artificial, of the later romances. Romance has a special charter to neglect chronology; but the chronology here is exceptionally wanton. After the above-mentioned Battle of Wulpensand, the beaten side resigns itself quite comfortably to wait till the sons of the slain grow up: and to suit this arrangement the heroine remains in ill-treated captivity—washing clothes by the sea-shore—for fifteen years or so. And even thus the climax is not reached; for Gudrun's companion in this unpleasant task, and apparently (since they are married at the same time) her equal, or nearly so, in age, has in the exordium of the poem also been the companion of Gudrun's grandmother in durance to some griffins, from whom they were rescued by Gudrun's grandfather.

One does not make peddling criticisms of this kind on any legend that has the true poetic character of power — of sweeping the reader along with it; but this I, at least, can hardly find in *Kudrun*. It consists of three or perhaps four parts: the initial adventures of Child Hagen of Ireland with the griffins who carry him off; the wooing of his daughter Hilde by King Hetel, whose ambassadors, Wate, Morunc, and Horant, play a great part throughout the poem; the subsequent wooing of *her* daughter Gudrun, and her imprisonment and ill-usage by Gerlind, her wooer's mother; her rescue by her lover Herwig after many years, and the slaughter of her tyrants, especially Gerlind, which "Wate der alte" makes. There is also a generally happy ending, which, rather contrary

to the somewhat ferocious use and wont of these poems, is made to include Hartmuth, Gudrun's unsuccessful wooer, and his sister Ortrun. The most noteworthy character, perhaps, is the above-mentioned Wate (or *Wade*), who is something like Hagen in the *Nibelungenlied* as far as valour and ferocity go, but is more of a subordinate. Gudrun herself has good touches—especially where in her joy at the appearance of her rescuers she flings the hated "wash" into the sea, and in one or two other passages. But she is nothing like such a *person* as Brynhild in the Volsung story or Kriemhild in the *Nibelungenlied*. Even the "wash" incident and the state which, in the teeth of her enemies, she takes upon her afterwards—the finest thing in the poem, though it frightens some German critics who see beauties elsewhere that are not very clear to eyes not native—fail to give her this personality. A better touch of nature still, though a slight one, is her lover Herwig's fear, when he meets with a slight mishap before the castle of her prison, that she may see it and reproach him with it after they are married. But on the whole, *Kudrun*, though an excellent story of adventure, is not a great poem in the sense in which the *Nibelungenlied* is one.

Besides these two long poems (the greater of which, the *Nibelungenlied*, connects itself indirectly with others through the personage of Dietrich[1]) there is a

[1] The very name of this remarkable personage seems to have exercised a fascination over the early German mind, and appears as given to others (Wolfdietrich, Hugdietrich) who have nothing to do with him of Verona.

group of shorter and rather older pieces, attributed in their present forms to the twelfth century, and not much later than the German translation of the *Chanson de Roland* by a priest named Conrad, which is sometimes put as early as 1130, and the German translation (see chapter iv.) of the *Alixandre* by Lamprecht, which may be even older. Among these smaller epics, poems on the favourite mediæval subjects of Solomon and Marcolf, St Brandan, &c., are often classed, but somewhat wrongly, as they belong to a different school. Properly of the group are *König Rother*, *Herzog Ernst*, and *Orendel*. All these suggest distinct imitation of the *chansons*, *Orendel* inclining rather to the legendary and travelling kind of *Jourdains de Blaivies* or *Huon*, *Herzog Ernst* to the more feudal variety. *König Rother*,[1] the most important of the batch, is a poem of a little more than five thousand lines, of rather irregular length and rhythm, but mostly very short, rhymed, but with a leaning towards assonance. The strong connection of these poems with the *chansons* is also shown by the fact that Rother is made grandfather of Charlemagne and King of Rome. Whether he had anything to do with the actual Lombard King Rother of the seventh century is only a speculative question; the poem itself seems to be Bavarian, and to date from about 1150. The story is one of wooing under considerable difficulties, and thus in some respects at least nearer to a *roman d'aventures* than a *chanson*.

Shorter national epics.

It will depend on individual taste whether the

[1] Ed. Von Bahder. Halle, 1884.

reader prefers the so-called "art-poetry" which broke out in Germany, almost wholly on a French impulse, but with astonishing individuality and colour of national and personal character, towards the end of the twelfth century, to the folk-poetry, of which the greater examples have been mentioned hitherto, whether he reverses the preference, or whether, in the mood of the literary student proper, he declines to regard either with preference, but admires and delights in both.[1] On either side there are compensations for whatever loss may be urged by the partisans of the other. It may or may not be an accident that the sons of adoption are more numerous than the sons of the house: it is not so certain that the one group is to be on any true reckoning preferred to the other.

Literary poetry.

In any case the German literary poetry (a much better phrase than *kunst-poesie*, for there is plenty of art on both sides) forms a part, and, next to its French originals, perhaps the greatest part, of that extraordinary and almost unparalleled blossoming of literature which, starting from France, overspread the whole of Europe at one time, the last half or quarter of the twelfth century, and the first quarter of the thirteenth. Four names, great and all but of the greatest—Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried of Strasburg, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Walther von der Vogelweide—illustrate it as far as

Its four chief masters.

[1] The subjects of the last paragraph form, it will be seen, a link between the two, being at least probably based on German traditions, but influenced in form by French.

Germany is concerned. Another, somewhat earlier than these, and in a way their master, Eilhart von Oberge, is supposed or rather known to have dealt with the Tristram story before Gottfried; and Heinrich von Veldeke, in handling the Æneid, communicated to Germany something of a directly classical, though more of a French, touch. We have spoken of the still earlier work of Conrad and Lamprecht, while in passing must be mentioned other things fashioned after French patterns, such as the *Kaiserchronik*, which is attributed to Bavarian hands. The period of flourishing of the literary poetry proper was not long—1150 to 1350 would cover very nearly the whole of it, and here, as elsewhere, it is impossible to deal with every individual, or even with the majority of individuals. But some remarks in detail, though not in great detail, on the four principals above referred to, will put the German literary "state" of the time almost as well as if all the battalions and squadrons were enumerated. Hartmann, Gottfried, and Wolfram, even in what we have of them, lyric writers in part, were chiefly writers of epic or romance; Walther is a song-writer pure and simple.

Excellence, both natural and acquired, of German verse.

One thing may be said with great certainty of the division of literature to which we have come, that none shows more clearly the natural aptitude of the people who produced it for poetry. It is a familiar observation from beginners in German who have any literary taste, that German poetry reads naturally, German

prose does not. In verse the German disencumbers himself of that gruesome clumsiness which almost always besets him in the art he learnt so late, and never learnt to any perfection. To "say" is a trouble to him, a trouble too often unconquerable; to sing is easy enough. And this truth, true of all centuries of German literature, is never truer than here. Translated or adapted verse is not usually the most cheerful department of poetry. The English romances, translated or adapted from the French, at times on the whole later than these, have been unduly abused; but they are certainly not the portion of the literature of his country on which an Englishman would most pride himself. Even the home-grown and, as I would fain believe, home-made legend of Arthur, had to wait till the fifteenth century before it met, and then in prose, a worthy master in English.

Originality of its adaptation.

But the German adapters of French at the meeting of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are persons of very different calibre from the translators of *Alexander* and the other English-French romances, even from those who with far more native talent Englished *Havelok* and *Horn*. If I have spoken harshly of German admiration of *Kudrun*, I am glad to make this amends and to admit that Gottfried's *Tristan* is by far the best of all the numerous rehandlings of the story which have come down to us. If we must rest Hartmann von Aue's chief claims on the two *Büchlein*, on the songs, and on the delightful *Armer Heinrich*, yet his *Iwein* and his *Erec* can hold their own even with two of the

freshest and most varied of Chrestien's original poems. No one except the merest pedant of originality would hesitate to put *Parzival* above *Percevale le Gallois*, though Wolfram von Eschenbach may be thought to have been less fortunate with *Willehalm*. And though in the lyric, the debt due to both troubadour and *trouvère* is unmistakable, it is equally unmistakable what mighty usury the minnesingers have paid for the capital they borrowed. The skill both of Northern and Southern Frenchmen is seldom to seek in lyric: we cannot give them too high praise as fashioners of instruments for other men to use. The cheerful bird-voice of the *trouvère*, the half artificial but not wholly insincere intensity of his brethren of the *langue d'oc*, will never miss their meed. But for real "cry," for the diviner elements of lyric, we somehow wait till we hear it in

"Under der linden
An der heide,
da unser zweier bette was,
da muget ir vinden
schone beide
gebrochen bluomen unde gras.
Vor dem walde in einem tal,
tandaradei!
schone sanc diu nahtegal." [1]

At last we are free from the tyranny of the iambic, and have variety beyond the comparative freedom of the trochee. The blessed liberty of trisyllabic feet not merely comes like music, but is for the first time complete music, to the ear.

[1] Walther's ninth *Lied*, opening stanza.

Historians arrange the process of borrowing from the French and adjusting prosody to the loans in, roughly speaking, three stages. The first of these is represented by Lamprecht's *Alexander* and Conrad's *Roland;* while the second and far more important has for chief exponents an anonymous rendering of the universally popular *Flore et Blanchefleur*,[1] the capital example of a pure love-story in which love triumphs over luck and fate, and differences of nation and religion. Of this only fragments survive, and the before-mentioned first German version of the Tristan story by Eilhart von Oberge exists only in a much altered form of the fifteenth century. But both, as well as the work in lyric and narrative of Heinrich von Veldeke, date well within the twelfth century, and the earliest of them may not be much younger than its middle. It was Heinrich who seems to have been the chief master in form of the greater poets mentioned above, and now to be noticed as far as it is possible to us. We do not know, personally speaking, very much about them, though the endless industry of their commentators, availing itself of not a little sheer guesswork, has succeeded in spinning various stories concerning them; and the curious incident of the *Wartburg-krieg* or minstrels' tournament, though reported much later, very likely has sound traditional foundations. But it is not very necessary to believe, for instance, that Gottfried von Strasburg makes an attack on Wolfram von Eschenbach. And generally the best attitude is

The pioneers. Heinrich von Veldeke.

[1] Found in every language, but *originally* French.

that of an editor of the said Gottfried (who himself rather fails to reck his own salutary rede by proceeding to redistribute the ordinary attribution of poems), "Ich bekenne dass ich in diesen Dingen skeptischer Natur bin."

Gottfried of Strasburg.

If, however, even Gottfried's own authorship of the *Tristan*[1] is rather a matter of extremely probable inference than of certain knowledge, and if the lives of most of the poets are very little known, the poems themselves are fortunately there, for every one who chooses to read and to form his own opinion about them. The palm for work of magnitude in every sense belongs to Gottfried's *Tristan* and to Wolfram's *Parzival*, and as it happens—as it so often happens—the contrasts of these two works are of the most striking and interesting character. The Tristram story, as has been said above, despite its extreme popularity and the abiding hold which it has exercised on poets as well as readers, is on the whole of a lower and coarser kind than the great central Arthurian legend. The philtre, though it supplies a certain excuse for the lovers, degrades the purely romantic character of their affection in more than compensating measure; the conduct of Iseult to the faithful Brengwain, if by no means unfeminine, is exceedingly detestable; and if Tristram was nearly as good a knight as Lancelot, he certainly was not nearly so good a lover or nearly so thorough a gentleman. But the attractions of the story were and are all the greater, we need not say to the vulgar, but to the

[1] Ed. Bechstein. 3d ed., 2 vols. Leipzig, 1891.

general; and Gottfried seems to have been quite admirably and almost ideally qualified to treat them. His French original is not known, for the earlier French versions of this story have perished or only survive in fragments; and there is an almost inextricable coil about the "Thomas" to whom Gottfried refers, and who used to be (though this has now been given up) identified with no less a person than Thomas the Rhymer, Thomas of Erceldoune himself. But we can see, as clearly as if we had parallel texts, that Gottfried treated his original as all real and sensible poets do treat their originals—that is to say, that he took what he wanted, added what he chose, and discarded what he pleased. In his handling of the French octosyllable he at once displays that impatience of the rigidly syllabic system of prosody which Teutonic poetry of the best kind always shows sooner or later. At first the octosyllables are arranged in a curious and not particularly charming scheme of quatrains, not only mono-rhymed, but so arranged that the very same words occur in alternate places, or in 1, 4, and 2, 3—"Man," "kan," "man," "kan"; "list," "ist," "ist," "list,"—the latter order being in this interesting, that it suggests the very first appearance of the *In Memoriam* stanza. But Gottfried was much too sensible a poet to think of writing a long poem—his, which is not complete, and was continued by Ulrich von Turheim, by an Anon, and by Heinrich von Freiberg, extends to some twenty thousand lines—in such a measure as this. He soon takes up the simple octosyllabic couplet, treated, however, with great free-

dom. The rhymes are sometimes single, sometimes double, occasionally even triple. The syllables constantly sink to seven, and sometimes even to six, or extend themselves, by the admission of trisyllabic feet, to ten, eleven, if not even twelve. Thus, once more, the famous "Christabel" metre is here, not indeed in the extremely mobile completeness which Coleridge gave it, nor even with quite such an indulgence in anapæsts as Spenser allows himself in "The Oak and the Brere," but to all intents and purposes fully constituted, if not fully developed.

And Gottfried is quite equal to his form. One may feel, indeed, and it is not unpleasant to feel, that evidence of the "young hand," which consists in digressions from the text, of excursus and ambages, essays, as it were, to show, "Here I am speaking quite for myself, and not merely reading off book." But he tells the story very well—compare, for instance, the crucial point of the substitution of Brengwain for Iseult in him and in the English *Sir Tristrem*, or the charming account of the "Minnegrotte" in the twenty-seventh song, with the many other things of the kind in French, English, and German of the time. Also he has constant little bursts, little spurts, of half-lyrical cry, which lighten the narrative charmingly.

> "Diu wise Isôt, diu schoene Isôt,
> Diu liuhtet alse der morgenrot,"

is the very thing the want of which mars the pleasantly flowing but somewhat featureless octosyllables

of his French models. In the famous passage[1] where he has been thought to reflect on Wolfram, he certainly praises other poets without stint, and shows himself a generous as well as a judicious critic. How Hartmann von Aue hits the meaning of a story! how loud and clear rings the crystal of his words! Did not Heinrich von Veldeke "imp the first shoot on Teutish tongues" (graft French on German poetry)? With what a lofty voice does the nightingale of the Bird-Meadow (Walther) warble across the heath! Nor is it unpleasant to come shortly afterwards to our old friends Apollo and the Camœnæ, the nine "Sirens of the ears"—a slightly mixed reminiscence, but characteristic of the union of classical and romantic material which communicates to the Middle Ages so much of their charm. Indeed nowhere in this Pisgah sight of literature would it be pleasanter to come down and expatiate on the particular subject than in the case of these Middle High German poets.

Hartmann von Aue.

Hartmann von Aue,[2] the subject of Gottfried's highest eulogy, has left a bulkier—at least a more varied—poetical baggage than his eulogist, whose own legacy is not small. It will depend a good deal on individual taste whether his actual poetical powers be put lower or higher. We have of his, or attributed to him, two long romances of adventure, translations or adaptations of the *Chev-*

[1] *Tristan*, 8th song, l. 4619 and onwards. The crucial passage is a sharp rebuke of "finders [*vindære, trouvères*] of wild tales," or one particular such who plays tricks on his readers and utters unintelligible things. It *may* be Wolfram: it also may not be.

[2] Ed. Bech. 3d. ed., 3 vols. Leipzig, 1893.

alier au Lyon and the *Erec et Énide* of Chrestien de Troyes; a certain number of songs, partly amatory, partly religious, two curious pieces entitled *Die Klage* and *Büchlein*, a verse-rendering of a subject which was much a favourite, the involuntary incest and atonement of St Gregory of the Rock; and lastly, his masterpiece, *Der Arme Heinrich.*

Erec der Wanderære *and* Iwein.

In considering the two Arthurian adventure-stories, it is fair to remember that in Gottfried's case we have not the original, while in Hartmann's we have, and that the originals here are two of the very best examples in their kind and language. That Hartmann did not escape the besetting sin of all adapters, and especially of all mediæval adapters, the sin of amplification and watering down, is quite true. It is shown by the fact that while Chrestien contents himself in each case with less than seven thousand lines (and he has never been thought a laconic poet), Hartmann extends both in practically the same measure (though the licences above referred to make the lines often much shorter than the French, while Hartmann himself does not often make them much longer)—in the one case to over eight thousand lines, in the other to over ten. But it would not be fair to deny very considerable merits to his versions. They are readable with interest after the French itself: and in the case of *Erec* after the *Mabinogion* and the *Idylls of the King* also. It cannot be said, however, that in either piece the poet handles his subject with the same appearance of mastery which belongs to Gottfried: and this is not to be altogether

accounted for by the fact that the stories themselves are less interesting. Or rather it may be said that his selection of these stories, good as they are in their way, when greater were at his option, somewhat "speaks him" as a poet.

The next or lyrical division shows Hartmann more favourably, though still not exactly as a great poet. *Lyrics.* The "Frauenminne," or profane division, of these has something of the artificial character which used very unjustly to be charged against the whole love-poetry of the Middle Ages, and which certainly does affect some of it. There is nowhere the "cry" that we find in the best of Gottfried's "nightingales" —the lyric poets as opposed to the epic. He does not seem to have much command of trisyllabic measures, and is perhaps happiest in the above-mentioned mono-rhymed quatrain, apparently a favourite measure then, which he uses sometimes in octosyllables, but often also in decasyllables. I do not know, and it would probably be difficult to say, what was the first appearance of the decasyllable, which in German, as in English, was to become on the whole the staple measure of non-lyrical poetry and the not infrequent medium of lyrical. But this must be fairly early, and certainly is a good example. The "Gottesminne," or, as our own old word has it, the "Divine" Poems, are very much better. Hartmann himself was a crusader, and there is nothing merely conventional in his few lays from the crusading and pilgrim standpoint. Indeed the very first words, expressing his determination after his lord's death to leave the world to itself,

have a better ring than anything in his love-poetry; and the echo is kept up in such simple but true sayings as this about "Christ's flowers" (the badge of the cross):—

"Min froude wart nie sorgelos
Unz an die tage
Daz ich mir Krystes bluomen kos
Die ich hie trage."

The two curious booklets or complaints (for each bore the title of *Büchlein* in its own day, and each is a *Klage*) and the *Gregorius* touch the lyric on one side and the adventure poems on the other. *Gregorius*, indeed, is simply a *roman d'aventures* of pious tendency; and there cannot be very much doubt that it had a French original. It extends to some four thousand lines, and does not show any poetical characteristics very different from those of *Erec* and *Iwein*, though they are applied to different matter. In size the two "booklets" stand in a curiously diminishing ratio to *Erec* with its ten thousand verses, *Iwein* with its eight, and *Gregorius* with its four; for *Die Klage* has a little under two thousand, and the *Büchlein* proper a little under one. *Die Klage* is of varied structure, beginning with octosyllables, of which the first—

The "booklets."

"Minne waltet grozer kraft"—

has a pleasant trochaic cadence: continuing after some sixteen hundred lines (if indeed it be a continuation and not a new poem) in curious long *laisses*, rather than stanzas, of eights and sevens rhymed on one continu-

ous pair of single and double rhymes, *eit unde: ant ende*, &c. The *Büchlein* proper is all couplets, and ends less deplorably than its beginning—

"Owê, Owê, unde owê!"—

might suggest. It is, however, more serious than the *Klage*, which is really a *débat* (as the technical term in French poetry then went) between Body and Soul, and of no unusual kind.

Der Arme Heinrich.

Fortunately for Hartmann, he has left another work, *Der Arme Heinrich*, which is thought to be his last, and is certainly his most perfect. It is almost a pity that Longfellow, in his adaptation of it, did not stick closer to the original; for pleasant as *The Golden Legend* is, it is more of a pastiche and mosaic than *Der Arme Heinrich*, one of the simplest, most direct, and most touching of mediæval poems. Heinrich (also Von Aue) is a noble who, like Sir Isumbras and other examples of the no less pious than wise belief of the Middle Ages in Nemesis, forgets God and is stricken for his sin with leprosy. He can only recover by the blood of a pure maiden; and half despairing of, half revolting at, such a cure, he gives away all his property but one farm, and lives there in misery. The farmer's daughter learns his doom and devotes herself. Heinrich refuses for a time, but yields: and they travel to Salerno, where, as the sacrifice is on the point of completion, Heinrich sees the maiden's face through a crack in the doctor's room-wall, feels the impossibility of allowing her to die, and stops the crime. He is rewarded

by a cure as miraculous as was his harm; recovers his fortune, and marries the maiden. A later termination separates them again; but this is simply the folly and bad taste of a certain, and only a certain, perversion of mediæval sentiment, the crowning instance of which is found in *Guy of Warwick*. Hartmann himself was no such simpleton; and (with only an infinitesimal change of a famous sentence) we may be sure that as he was a good lover so he made a good end to his story

Wolfram von Eschenbach.

Although German writers may sometimes have mispraised or overpraised their greatest mediæval poet, it is certain that we find in Wolfram von Eschenbach[1] qualities which, in the thousand years between the Fall and the Renaissance of classical literature, can be found to anything like the same extent in only two known writers, the Italian Dante and the Englishman Langland; while if he is immensely Dante's inferior in poetical quality, he has at least one gift, humour, which Dante had not, and is far Langland's superior in variety and in romantic charm. He displays, moreover, a really curious contrast to the poets already mentioned, and to most of the far greater number not mentioned. It is in Wolfram first that we come across, in anything like noticeable measure, that mastery of poetical mysticism which is the pride, and justly the pride, of the German Muse. Gottfried and Hartmann are rather practical folk. Hartmann has at best a pious and Gottfried a profane

[1] Complete works. Ed. Lachmann. Berlin, 1838. *Parzival und Titurel.* 2 vols. Ed. Bartsch. Leipzig, 1870.

fancy; of the higher qualities of imagination there is little or nothing in them; and not much in the vast crowd of the Minnesingers, from the chief "nightingale" Walther downwards. Wolfram, himself a Minnesinger (indeed the term is loosely applied to all the poets of this time, and may be very properly claimed by Gottfried and Hartmann, though the former has left no lyric), has left us few but very remarkable *aubades*, in which the commonplace of the morning-song, with its disturbance of lovers, is treated in no commonplace way. But his fame rests on the three epics, *Parzival*, *Titurel*, and *Willehalm*. It is practically agreed that *Parzival* represents the flourishing time, and *Willehalm* the evening, of his work; there is more critical disagreement about the time of composition of *Titurel*, which, though it was afterwards continued and worked up by another hand, exists only in fragments, and presents a very curious difference of structure as compared both with *Parzival* (with which in subject it is connected) and with *Willehalm*. Both these are in octosyllables: *Titurel* is in a singular and far from felicitous stanza, which stands to that of *Kudrun* much as the *Kudrun* stanza does to that of the *Nibelungen*. Here there are none but double rhymes; and not merely the second half of the fourth, but the second half of the second line "tails out" in the manner formerly described. The consequence is, that while in *Kudrun* it is, as was remarked, difficult to get any swing on the metre, in *Titurel* it is simply impossible; and it has been thought without any improbability

Titurel.

that the fragmentary condition of the piece is due to the poet's reasonable discontent with the shackles he had imposed on himself. The substance is good enough, and would have made an interesting chapter in the vast working up of the Percevale story which Wolfram probably had in his mind.

Willehalm.

Willehalm, on the other hand, is not only in form but in substance a following of the French, and of no less a French poem than the *Battle of Aliscans*, which has been so fully dealt with above. It is interesting to compare advocates of the two, and see how German critics usually extol the improvements made by the German poet, while the French sneer at his preachments and wateringsdown. But we need say nothing more than that if Wolfram's fame rested on *Willehalm*, the notice of him here would probably not go beyond a couple of lines.

Parzival.

Parzival, however, is a very different matter. It has of late years received adventitious note from the fact of its selection by Wagner as a libretto; but it did not need this, and it was the admiration of every fit reader long before the opera appeared. The Percevale story, it may be remembered, lies somewhat outside of the main Arthurian legend, which, however, had hardly taken full form when Wolfram wrote. It has been strongly fought for by the Celticists as traceable originally to the Welsh legend of Peredur; but it is to be observed that neither in this form nor in the English version (which figures among the Thornton Romances) does the Graal

make any figure. In the huge poem, made huger by continuators, of Chrestien de Troyes, Percival becomes a Graal-seeker; and on the whole it would appear that, as observed before, he in point of time anticipates Galahad and the story which works the Graal thoroughly into the main Arthurian tale. According to Wolfram (but this is a romantic commonplace), Chrestien was culpably remiss in telling the story, and his deficiencies had to be made up by a certain Provençal named Kyot. Unfortunately there are no traces elsewhere of any such person, or of any version, in Provençal or otherwise, between Chrestien's and Wolfram's. The two, however, stand far enough apart to have admitted of more than one intermediary; or rather no number of intermediaries could really have bridged the chasm, which is one of spirit rather than of matter. In *Percevale le Gallois*, though the Graal exists, and though the adventures are rather more on the outside of the strictly Arthurian cycle than usual, we are still in close relations with that cycle, and the general tone and handling are similar (except in so far as Chrestien is a better *trouvère* than most) to those of fifty other poems. In *Parzival* we are translated into another country altogether. Arthur appears but seldom, and though the link with the Round Table is maintained by the appearances of Gawain, who as often, though not always, plays to Percevale the part of light to serious hero, here almost only, and here not always, are we in among "kenned folk." The Graal mountain, Montsalvatsch, is even more in fairyland than the "enchanted towers

of Carbonek"; the magician Klingschor is a more shadowy person far than Merlin.

> "Cundrie la Sorziere
> Diu unsueze und doch diu fiere"

is a much more weird personage than Morgane or Nimue, though she may also be more "unsweet." Part of this unfamiliar effect is no doubt due to Wolfram's singular fancy for mutilating and torturing his French names, to his admixture of new characters and adventures, and especially to the almost entirely new genealogy which he introduces. In the pedigree, containing nearly seventy names, which will be found at the end of Bartsch's edition, not a tithe will be familiar to the reader of the English and French romances; and that reader will generally find those whom he does know provided with new fathers and mothers, daughters and wives.

But these would be very small matters if it were not for other differences, not of administration but of spirit. There may have been something too much of the attempt to credit Wolfram with anti-dogmatic views, and with a certain Protestant preference of simple repentance and amendment to the performance of stated rites and penances. What is unmistakable is the way in which he lifts the story, now by phrase, now by verse effect, now by the indefinable magic of sheer poetic handling, out of ordinary ways into ways that are not ordinary. There may perhaps be allowed to be a certain want of "architectonic" in him. He has not made of Parzival and Condwiramurs,

of Gawain and Orgeluse, anything like the complete drama which we find (brought out by the genius of Malory, but existing before) in the French-English Arthurian legend. But any one who knows the origins of that legend from *Erec et Énide* to *Durmart le Gallois*, and from the *Chevalier au Lyon* to the *Chevalier as Deux Espées*, must recognise in him something higher and larger than can be found in any of them, as well as something more human, if even in the best sense more fairy-tale like, than the earlier and more Western legends of the Graal as we have them in *Merlin* and the other French books. Here again, not so much for the form as for the spirit, we find ourselves driven to the word "great"—a great word, and one not to be misused as it so often is.

Walther von der Vogelweide.

Yet it may be applied in a different sense, though without hesitation, to our fourth selected name, Walther von der Vogelweide,[1] a name in itself so agreeable that one really has to take care lest it raise an undue prejudice in his favour. Perhaps a part of his greatness belongs to him as the chief representative of a class, not, as in Wolfram's case, because of individual merit,—a part also to his excellence of form, which is a claim always regarded with doubt and dislike by some, though not all. It is nearly a quarter of a century since the present writer first possessed himself of and first read the delectable volume in which Franz Pfeiffer opened his series of German Classics of the Middle Ages with this singer; and every subsequent reading, in whole

[1] Ed. Bartsch. 4th ed. Leipzig, 1873.

or in part, has only increased the attraction. There are some writers — not many — who seem to defy criticism by a sort of native charm, and of these Walther is one. If we listen to some grave persons, it is a childish thing to write a poem, as he does his second *Lied*, in stanzas every one of which is monorhymed on a different vowel. But as one reads

"Diu werlt was gelf, röt unde blâ,"[1]

one only prays for more such childishness. Is there a better song of May and maidens than

"So diu bluomen uz dem grase dringent"?

where the very phrase is romance and nature itself, and could never be indulged in by a "classical" poet, who would say (very justly), "flowers grow in beds, not grass; and if in the latter, they ought to be promptly mown and rolled down." How intoxicating, after deserts of iambs, is the dactylic swell of

"Wol mich der stunde, daz ich sie erkande"!

how endearing the drooping cadence of

"Bin ich dir unmære
Des enweiz ich niht; ich minne dich"!

---

[1] "Diu werlt was gelf, röt unde blâ,
grüen, in dem walde und anderswâ
kleine vogele sungen dâ.
nû schriet aber den nebelkrâ.
pfligt s'iht ander varwe? jâ,
s'ist worden bleich und übergrâ:
des rimpfet sich vil manic brâ.'

Similar stanzas in *e*, *i*, *o*, *u* follow in order.

how small the change which makes a jewel out of a commonplace in

"Si hat ein *kûssen* daz ist rot"!

But to go through the nearly two hundred pieces of Walther's lyric would be here impossible. His *Leich*, his only example of that elaborate kind, the most complicated of the early German lyrical forms, is not perhaps his happiest effort; and his *Sprüche*, a name given to short lyrical pieces in which the Minnesingers particularly delighted, and which correspond pretty nearly, though not exactly, to the older sense of "epigram," seldom, though sometimes, possess the charm of the *Lieder* themselves. But these *Lieder* are, for probable freedom from indebtedness and intrinsic exquisiteness of phrase and rhythm, unsurpassed, perhaps unequalled. To compare Walther to Petrarch, and to talk of the one being superior or inferior to the other, is to betray hopeless insensibility to the very rudiments of criticism. They are absolutely different, —the one the embodiment of stately form and laboured intellectual effort—of the Classical spirit; the other the mouthpiece of the half-inarticulate, all-suggesting music that is at once the very soul and the very inseparable garment of Romance. Some may like one better, others the other; the more fortunate may enjoy both. But the greatest of all gulfs is the gulf fixed between the Classical and the Romantic; and few there are, it seems, who can cross it.

Perhaps something may be expected as to the personality of these poets, a matter which has had too

great a place assigned to it in literary history. Luckily, unless he delights in unbridled guessing, the historian of mediæval literature is better entitled to abstain from it than any other. But something may perhaps be said of the men whose work has just been discussed, for there are not uninteresting shades of difference between them. In Germany, as in France, the *trouvère-jongleur* class existed; the greater part of the poetry of the twelfth century, including the so-called small epics, *König Rother* and the rest, is attributed to them, and they were the objects of a good deal of patronage from the innumerable nobles, small and great, of the Empire. On the other hand, though some men of consequence were poets, the proportion of these is, on the whole, considerably less than in France proper or in Provence. The German noble was not so much literary as a patron of literature, like that Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia, whose court saw the fabulous or semi-fabulous "War of the Wartburg," with Wolfram von Eschenbach and Heinrich von Ofterdingen as chief champions. Indeed this court was the main resort of German poets and minstrels till Saint Elizabeth of Hungary in the next generation proved herself a rather "sair sanct" for literature, which has since returned her good for evil.

Personality of the poets.

To return to our four selected poets. Gottfried is supposed to have been neither noble, nor even directly attached to a noble household, nor a professional minstrel, but a burgher of the town which gives him his name—indeed a caution is necessary to the effect that

the *von* of these early designations, like the *de* of their French originals, is by no means, as a rule, a sign of nobility. Hartmann von Aue, though rather attached to than a member of the noble family of the same name from which he has taken the hero of *Der Arme Heinrich*, seems to have been admitted to knightly society, was a crusader, and appears to have been of somewhat higher rank than Gottfried, whom, however, he resembled in this point, that both were evidently men of considerable education. We rise again in status, though probably not in wealth, and certainly not in education, when we come to Wolfram von Eschenbach. He was of a family of Northern Bavaria or Middle Franconia; he bore (for there are diversities on this heraldic point) two axe-blades argent on a field gules, or a bunch of five flowers argent springing from a water-bouget gules; and he is said by witnesses in 1608 to have been described on his tombstone as a knight. But he was certainly poor, had not received much education, and he was attached in the usual guest-dependant fashion of the time to the Margrave of Vohburg (whose wife, Elizabeth of Bavaria, received his poetical declarations) and to Hermann of Thuringia. He was a married man, and had a daughter.

Lastly, Walther von der Vogelweide appears to have been actually a "working poet," as we may say—a *trouvère*, who sang his own poems as he wandered about, and whose surname was purely a decorative one. He lived, no doubt, by gifts; indeed, the historians are proud to record that a bishop gave him a

fur coat precisely on the 12th of November 1203. He was probably born in Austria, lived at Vienna with Duke Frederic of Babenberg for some time, and held poetical offices in the households of several other princes, including the Emperor Frederick II., who gave him an estate at last. It should be said that there are those who insist that he also was of knightly position, and was Vogelweide of that ilk, inasmuch as we find him called "herr," the supposed mark of distinction of a gentleman at the time. Such questions are of importance in their general bearing on the question of literature at given dates, not in respect of individual persons. It must be evident that no word which, like "herr," is susceptible of general as well as technical meanings, can be absolutely decisive in such a case, unless we find it in formal documents. Also, after Frederick's gift Walther would have been entitled to it, though he was not before. At any rate, the entirely wandering life, and the constant relationship to different protectors, which are in fact the only things we know about him, are more in accordance with the notion of a professional minstrel than with that of a man who, like Wolfram, even if he had no estate and was not independent of patronage, yet had a settled home of his own, and was buried where he was born.

The Minnesingers generally.

The introduction of what may be called a representative system into literary history has been here rendered necessary by the fact that the school-resemblance so common in mediæval writers is nowhere more common than among the Minne-

singers,[1] and that the latter are extraordinarily numerous, if not also extraordinarily monotonous. One famous collection contains specimens of 160 poets, and even this is not likely to include the whole of those who composed poetry of the kind before Minnesong changed (somewhere in the thirteenth century or at the beginning of the fourteenth, but at times and in manners which cannot be very precisely fixed) into Meistersong. The chief lyric poets before Walther were Heinrich von Veldeke, his contemporary and namesake Heinrich von Morungen, and Reinmar von Hagenau, whom Gottfried selects as Walther's immediate predecessor in "nightingaleship": the chief later ones, Neidhart von Regenthal, famous for dance-songs; Tannhäuser, whose actual work, however, is of a mostly burlesque character, as different as possible from, and perhaps giving rise by very contrast to, the beautiful and terrible legend which connects his name with the Venus-berg (though Heine has managed in his version to combine the two elements); Ulrich von Lichtenstein, half an apostle, half a caricaturist of *Frauendienst* on the Provençal model; and, finally, Frauenlob or Heinrich von Meissen, who wrote at the end of our period and the beginning of the next for nearly fifty years, and may be said to be the link between Minnesong and Meistersong.

So also in the other departments of poetry, harbingers, contemporaries, and continuators, some of whom have been mentioned, most of whom it would be im-

[1] The standard edition or *corpus* of their work is that of Von der Hagen, in three large vols. Leipzig, 1838.

possible to mention, group round the greater masters, and as in France, so here, the departments themselves branch out in an almost bewildering manner. Germany, as may be supposed, had its full share of that "poetry of information" which constitutes so large a part of mediæval verse, though here even more than elsewhere such verse is rarely, except by courtesy, poetry. Families of later handlings, both of the folk epic and the literary romances, exist, such as the *Rosengarten*, the *Horny Siegfried*, and the story of Wolfdietrich in the one class; *Wigalois* and *Wigamur*, and a whole menagerie of poems deriving from the *Chevalier au Lyon*, on the other. With the general growth, half epidemic, half directly borrowed from France, of abstraction and allegory (*vide* next chapter), Satire made its way, and historians generally dwell on the "Frau Welt" of Konrad von Wurzburg in the middle of the thirteenth century, in which Wirent von Grafenburg (a well-known poet among the literary school, the author of *Wigalois*) is brought face to face with an incarnation of the World and its vanity. Volumes on volumes of moral poetry date from the thirteenth century, and culminate in the somewhat well-known *Renner*[1] of Hugo von Trimberg, dating from the very last year of our period: perhaps the most noteworthy is the *Bescheidenheit* of Freidank, a

[1] On this see the last passage, except the conclusion on *Reynard the Fox*, of Carlyle's Essay on "Early German Literature" noted above. Of the great romances, as distinguished from the *Nibelungen*, Carlyle did not know much, and he was not quite in sympathy either with their writers or with the Minnesingers proper. But the life-philosopher of *Reynard* and the *Renner* attracted him.

crusader *trouvère* who accompanied Frederick II. to the East. But in all this Germany is only following the general habit of the age, and to a great extent copying directly. Even in those greater writers who have been here noticed there is, as we have seen, not a little imitation; but the national and individual peculiarities more than excuse this. The national epics, with the *Nibelungenlied* at their head, the Arthurian stories transformed, of which in different ways *Tristan* and *Parzival*, but especially the latter, are the chief, and the Minnesong,—these are the great contributions of Germany during the period, and they are great indeed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE 'FOX,' THE 'ROSE,' AND THE MINOR CONTRIBUTIONS OF FRANCE.

THE PREDOMINANCE OF FRANCE—THE RISE OF ALLEGORY—LYRIC—THE "ROMANCE" AND THE "PASTOURELLE"—THE "FABLIAUX"—THEIR ORIGIN—THEIR LICENCE—THEIR WIT—DEFINITION AND SUBJECTS—EFFECT OF THE "FABLIAUX" ON LANGUAGE—AND ON NARRATIVE—CONDITIONS OF "FABLIAU"-WRITING—THE APPEARANCE OF IRONY—FABLES PROPER—'REYNARD THE FOX'—ORDER OF TEXTS—PLACE OF ORIGIN—THE FRENCH FORM—ITS COMPLICATIONS—UNITY OF SPIRIT—THE RISE OF ALLEGORY—THE SATIRE OF 'RENART'—THE FOX HIMSELF—HIS CIRCLE—THE BURIAL OF RENART—THE 'ROMANCE OF THE ROSE'—WILLIAM OF LORRIS AND JEAN DE MEUNG—THE FIRST PART—ITS CAPITAL VALUE—THE ROSE-GARDEN—"DANGER"—"REASON"—"SHAME" AND "SCANDAL"—THE LATER POEM—"FALSE-SEEMING"—CONTRAST OF THE PARTS—VALUE OF BOTH, AND CHARM OF THE FIRST—MARIE DE FRANCE AND RUTEBŒUF—DRAMA—ADAM DE LA HALLE—"ROBIN ET MARION"—THE "JEU DE LA FEUILLIE"—COMPARISON OF THEM—EARLY FRENCH PROSE—LAWS AND SERMONS—VILLEHARDOUIN—WILLIAM OF TYRE—JOINVILLE—FICTION—'AUCASSIN ET NICOLETTE.'

The predominance of France.

THE contributions of France to European literature mentioned in the three chapters (II.-IV.) which deal with the three main sections of Romance, great as we have seen them to be, by no

means exhausted the debt which literature owes to her during this period. It is indeed not a little curious that the productions of this time, long almost totally ignored in France itself, and even now rather grudgingly acknowledged there, are the only periodic set of productions that justify the claim, so often advanced by Frenchmen, that their country is at the head of the literary development of Europe. It was not so in the fourteenth century, when not only Chaucer in England, but Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio in Italy, attained literary heights to which none of their French contemporaries even approached. It was not so in the fifteenth, when France, despite Villon and others, was the very School of Dulness, and even England, with the help of the Scottish poets and Malory, had a slight advantage over her, while she was far outstripped by Italy. It was not so in the sixteenth, when Italy hardly yet fell behind, and Spain and England far outwent her: nor, according to any just estimate, in the seventeenth. In the eighteenth her pale correctness looks faint enough, not merely beside the massive strength of England, but beside the gathering force of Germany: and if she is the equal of the best in the nineteenth, it is at the very most a bare equality. But in the twelfth and thirteenth France, if not Paris, was in reality the eye and brain of Europe, the place of origin of almost every literary form, the place of finishing and polishing, even for those forms which she did not originate. She not merely taught, she wrought—and wrought consummately. She revived and transformed

the fable; perfected, if she did not invent, the beast-epic; brought the short prose tale to an exquisite completeness; enlarged, suppled, chequered, the somewhat stiff and monotonous forms of Provençal lyric into myriad-noted variety; devised the prose-memoir, and left capital examples of it; made attempts at the prose history; ventured upon much and performed no little in the vernacular drama; besides the vast performance, sometimes inspired from elsewhere but never as literature copied, which we have already seen, in her fostering if not mothering of Romance. When a learned and enthusiastic Icelander speaks of his patrimony in letters as "a native literature which, in originality, richness, historical and artistic worth, stands unrivalled in modern Europe," we can admire the patriot but must shake our heads at the critic. For by Dr Vigfusson's own confession the strength of Icelandic literature consists in the sagas, and the sagas are the product of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. At that very time France, besides the *chansons de geste*—as native, as original, as the sagas, and if less rich, far more artistic in form—France has to show the great romances proper, which Iceland herself, like all the world, copied, a lyric of wonderful charm and abundance, the vast comic wealth of the *fabliaux* and the *Fox*-epic, prose not merely of laws and homilies and rudimentary educational subjects, but of every variety, drama, history, philosophy, allegory, dream.

To give an account of these various things in great detail would not merely be impossible here, but would

injure the scheme and thwart the purpose of this history. We must survey them in the gross, or with a few examples—showing the lessons taught and the results achieved, from the lyric, which was probably the earliest, to the drama and the prose story, which were pretty certainly the latest of the French experiments. But we must give largest space to the singular growth of Allegory. This, to some extent in the beast-epic, to a far greater in one of the most epoch-making of European books, the *Romance of the Rose*, set a fashion in Europe which had hardly passed away in three hundred years, and which, latterly rather for the worse, but in the earlier date not a little for the better, coloured not merely the work directly composed in imitation of the great originals, but all literary stuff of every kind, from lyric to drama, and from sermons to prose tales.

The rise of Allegory.

It has been said elsewhere that the shaping of a prosody suitable for lyric was the great debt which Europe owes to the language of Provence. And this is not at all inconsistent with the undoubted critical fact that in a *Corpus Lyricorum* the best songs of the northern tongues would undoubtedly rank higher, according to all sound canons of poetical criticism, than the best lyrics of the southern. For, as it happens, we have lyrics in at least two most vigorous northern tongues before they had gone to school to southern prosody, and we can see at once the defects in them. The scanty remains of Anglo-Saxon lyric and the more copious remains of Icelandic

Lyric.

display, with no little power and pathos, and plenty of ill-organised "cry," an almost total lack of ability to sing. Every now and then their natural genius enables them to hit, clumsily and laboriously, on something—the refrain of the *Complaint of Deor*, the stepped stanzas of the *Lesson of Loddfafni*—resembling the more accomplished methods of more educated and long-descended literatures. But the poets are always in a Robinson Crusoe condition, and worse: for Robinson had at least seen the tools and utensils he needed, if he did not know how to make them. The scôps and scalds were groping for the very pattern of the tools themselves.

The *langue d'oc*, first of all vernacular tongues, borrowed from Latin, as Latin had borrowed from Greek, such of the practical outcomes of the laws of lyric harmony in Aryan speech as were suitable to itself; and passed the lesson on to the *trouvères* of the north of France—if indeed these did not work out the transfer for themselves almost independently. And as there was much more northern admixture, and in particular a less tyrannous softness of vowel-ending in the *langue d'oïl*, this second stage saw a great increase of suppleness, a great emancipation from monotony, a wonderful freshness and wealth of colour and form. It has been said, and I see no reason to alter the saying, that the French tongue in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was actually better suited for lyrical poetry, and did actually produce lyrical poetry, as far as prosody is concerned, of a fresher, freer, more spontaneous kind, from the twelfth century to the

beginning of the fifteenth than has ever been the case since.[1]

M. Alfred Jeanroy has written a learned and extensive monograph on *Les Origines de la Poesie Lyrique en France*, which with M. Gaston Raynaud's *Bibliographie des Chansonniers Français*, and his collection of *Motets* of our present period, is indispensable to the thorough student of the subject.[2] But for general literary purposes the two classics of the matter are, and are long likely to be, the charming *Romancero Français*[3] which M. Paulin Paris published in the very dawn of the study of mediæval literature in France, and the admirable *Romanzen und Pastourellen*[4] which Herr Karl Bartsch collected and issued a quarter of a century ago. Here as elsewhere the piecemeal system of publication which has been the bane of the whole subject is to be regretted, for with a little effort and a little division of labour the entire *corpus* of French lyric from the tenth to the fourteenth century might have been easily set before the public. But the two volumes above mentioned will enable the reader to judge its general characteristics with pretty absolute sureness; and if he desires to supplement them with the work of a single author, that of Thibaut of Cham-

[1] This is not inconsistent with allowing that no single French lyric poet is the equal of Walther von der Vogelweide, and that the exercises of all are hampered by the lack—after the earliest examples—of trisyllabic metres.

[2] M. Jeanroy, as is also the case with other writers of monographs mentioned in this chapter, has contributed to M. Petit de Julleville's *Histoire* (*v.* p. 23) on his subject.

[3] Paris, 1833. [4] Leipzig, 1870.

pagne or Navarre,[1] which is easily accessible, will form an excellent third.

The Romance *and the* Pastourelle.

In this northern lyric—that is to say, northern as compared with Provençal[2]—we find all or almost all the artificial forms which are characteristic of Provençal itself, some of them no doubt rather sisters than daughters of their analogues in the *langue d'oc*. Indeed, at the end of our present period, and still more later, the ingenuity of the *trouvères* seems to have pushed the strictly formal, strictly artificial part of the poetry of the troubadours to almost its furthest possible limits in varieties of *triolet* and *rondeau*, *ballade* and *chant royal*. But the *Romances* and the *Pastourelles* stand apart from these, and both are recognised by authorities among the troubadours themselves as specially northern forms. The differentia of each is in subject rather than in form, the "romance" in this sense being a short love-story, with little more than a single incident in it sometimes, but still always possessing an incident; the *Pastourelle*, a special variety of love-story of the kind so curiously popular in all mediæval languages, and so curiously alien from modern experience, where a passing knight sees a damsel of low degree, and woos her at once, with or without success, or where two personages of the shepherd kind sue and are sued with evil hap or good. In other words, the "romance" is supremely presented in English, and in the much-abused fifteenth century, by the *Nut-Browne Maid*, the

[1] Rheims, 1851.

[2] This for convenience' sake is postponed to chap. viii.

"pastourelle" by Henryson's *Robene and Makyne*. Perhaps there is nothing quite so good as either in the French originals of both; certainly there is nothing like the union of metrical felicity, romantic conduct, sweet but not mawkish sentiment, and never-flagging interest in the anonymous masterpiece which the ever-blessed Arnold preserved for us in his *Chronicle*. But the diffused merits — the so-to-speak "class-merits"—of the poems in general are very high indeed: and when the best of the other lyrics—*aubades*, *débats*, and what not—are joined to them, they supply the materials of an anthology of hardly surpassed interest, as well for the bubbling music of their refrains and the trill of their metre, as for the fresh mirth and joy of living in their matter. The "German paste in our composition," as another Arnold had it, and not only that, may make us prefer the German examples; but it must never be forgotten that but for these it is at least not improbable that those would never have existed.

To select capital examples from so large a body is no easy task. One or two, indeed, have "made fortune," the most famous of them being the great *aubade* (chief among its kind, as "En un vergier sotz folha d'albespi" is among the Provençal albas), which begins—

> "Gaite de la tor,
> Gardez entor
> Les murs, si Deus vos voie;"[1]

[1] *Romancero Français*, p. 66.

and where the *gaite* (watcher) answers (like a Cornish watcher of the pilchards)—

"Hu! et hu! et hu! et hu!"

Then there is the group, among the oldest and the best of all, assigned to Audefroy le Bâtard—a most delectable garland, which tells how the loves of Gerard and Fair Isabel are delayed (with the refrain "et joie atent Gerars"), and how the joy comes at last; of "belle Ydoine" and her at first ill-starred passion for "li cuens [the Count] Garsiles"; of Béatrix and Guy; of Argentine, whose husband better loved another; of Guy the second, who *aima Emmelot de foi*—all charming pieces of early verse. And then there are hundreds of others, assigned or anonymous, in every tone, from the rather unreasonable request of the lady who demands—

"Por coi me bast mes maris?
laysette!"

immediately answering her own question by confessing that he has found her embracing her lover, and threatening further justification; through the less impudent but still not exactly correct morality of "Henri and Aiglentine," to the blameless loves of Roland and "Bele Erembors" and the *moniage* of "Bele Doette" after her lover's death, with the words—

"Tant mar i fustes, cuens Do, frans de nature,
por vostre aor vestrai je la haire
ne sur mon cors n'arai pelice vaire."

This conduct differs sufficiently from that of the un-

named heroine of another song, who in the sweetest and smoothest of verse bids her husband never to mind if she stays with her lover that night, for the night is very short, and he, the husband, shall have her back to-morrow!

And besides the morality, perverse or touching, the quaint manners, the charming unusual names or forms of names, Oriour, Oriolanz, Ysabiaus, Aigline,—there are delightful fancies, borrowed often since:—

"Li rossignox est mon père,
Qui chante sur la ramée
el plus haut boscage;
La seraine ele est ma mère,
qui chante en la mer salée
el plus haut rivage."

Something in the very sound of the language keeps for us the freshness of the imagery—the sweet-briar and the hawthorn, the mavis and the oriole—which has so long become *publica materies*. It is not withered and hackneyed by time and tongues as, save when genius touches it, it is now. The dew is still on all of it; and, thanks to the dead language, the dead manners, it will always be on. All is just near enough to us for it to be enjoyed, as we cannot enjoy antiquity or the East; and yet the "wall of glass" which seven centuries interpose, while hiding nothing, keeps all intact, unhackneyed, strange, *fresh*. There may be better poetry in the world than these twelfth and thirteenth century French lyrics: there is certainly higher, grander, more respectable. But I doubt whether there is any sweeter or, in a certain

sense, more poignant. The nightingale and the mermaid were justified of their children.

It is little wonder that all Europe soon tried to imitate notes so charming, and in some cases, though other languages were far behind French in development, tried successfully. Our own "Alison,"[1] the first note of true English lyric, is a "romance" of the most genuine kind; the songs of Walther von der Vogelweide, of which we have also spoken, though they may rise higher, yet owe their French originals service, hold of them, would either never or much later have come into existence but for them. An astonishing privilege for a single nation to have enjoyed, if only for a short time; a privilege almost more astonishing in its reception than even in itself. France could point to the *chansons* and to the *romances*, to Audefroy le Bastard and Chrestien of Troyes, to Villehardouin and Thibaut, to William of Lorris and John of Meung, to the *fabliaux* writers and the cyclists of *Renart*, in justification of her claims. She shut them up; she forgot them; she sneered at them whenever they were remembered; and she appointed as her attorneys in the court of Parnassus Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux and François Arouet de Voltaire!

No more curious contrast, but also none which could more clearly show the enormous vigour and the unique variety of the French genius at this time, can be imagined than that which is presented by the next division to which we come—the division occupied by the celebrated poems, or at least

The Fabliaux.

[1] See p. 210.

verse-compositions, known as *fabliaux*. These, for reasons into which it is perhaps better not to inquire too closely, have been longer and better known than any other division of old French poetry. They were first collected and published a hundred and forty years ago by Barbazan; they were much commented on by Le Grand d'Aussy in the last years of the last century, were again published in the earlier years of the present by Méon, and recently have been re-collected, divested of some companions not strictly of their kind, and published in an edition desirable in every respect by M. Anatole de Montaiglon and M. Gaston Raynaud.[1] Since this collection M. Bedier has executed a monograph upon them which stands to the subject much as that of M. Jeanroy does to the Lyrics. But a great deal of it is occupied by speculations, more interesting to the folk-lorist than to the student of literature, as to the origin of the stories themselves. This, though a question of apparently inexhaustible attraction to some people, must not occupy us very long here. It shall be enough to say that many of these subjects are hardy perennials which meet us in all literatures, and the existence of which is more rationally to be accounted for by the supposition of a certain common form of story, resulting partly from the conditions of human life and character, partly from the conformation of the human intellect, than by supposing deliberate transmission and copying from one nation to another. For this latter explanation is one of those which, as has been said, only push ignorance further

[1] 6 vols. Paris, 1872-90.

back; and in fact, leave us at the last with no alternative except that which we might have adopted at the first.

Their origin.

That, however, some assistance may have been given to the general tendency to produce the same forms by the literary knowledge of earlier, especially Eastern, collections of tales is no extravagant supposition, and is helped by the undoubted fact that actual translations of such collections—*Dolopathos*, the *Seven Sages of Rome*,[1] and so forth—are found early in French, and chiefly at second-hand from the French in other languages. But the general tendency of mankind, reinforced and organised by a certain specially literary faculty and adaptability in the French genius, is on the whole sufficient to account for the *fabliau*.

Their licence.

It presents, as we have said, the most striking and singular contrast to the Lyric poems which we have just noticed. The technical morality of these is extremely accommodating, indeed (in its conventional and normal form) very low. But it is redeemed by an exquisite grace and charm, by true passion, and also by a great decency and accomplishment of actual diction. Coarse language—very rare in the romances, though there are a few examples of it—is rarer still in the elaborate formal lyric of the twelfth and thirteenth century in French. In the

[1] For these see the texts and editorial matter of *Dolopathos*, ed. Brunet and De Montaiglon (Bibliothèque Elzévirienne), Paris, 1856; and of *Le Roman des Sept Sages*, ed. G. Paris (*Soc. des Anc. Textes*), Paris, 1875. The English *Seven Sages* (in Weber, vol. iii.) has been thought to be of the thirteenth century. The *Gesta Romanorum* in any of its numerous forms is probably later.

fabliaux, which are only a very little later, and which seem not to have been a favourite form of composition very long after the fourteenth century had reached its prime, coarseness of diction, though not quite invariable, is the rule. Not merely are the subjects, in the majority of cases, distinctly "broad," but the treatment of them is broader still. In a few instances it is very hard to discern any wit at all, except a kind similar to that known much later in England as "selling bargains"; and almost everywhere the words which, according to a famous classical French tag, *bravent l'honnêteté*, in Latin, the use of which a Roman poet has vaunted as *Romana simplicitas*, and which for some centuries have been left alone by regular literature in all European languages till very recently,—appear to be introduced on purpose as part of the game. In fact, it is in the *fabliau* that the characteristic which Mr Matthew Arnold selected as the opprobrium of the French in life and literature practically makes its first appearance. And though the "lubricity" of these poems is free from some ugly features which appear after the Italian wars of the late fifteenth century, it has never been more frankly destitute of shamefacedness.

Their wit.

It would, however, be extremely unfair to let it be supposed that the *fabliaux* contain nothing but obscenity, or that they can offer attractions to no one save those whom obscenity attracts. As in those famous English followings of them, where Chaucer considerably reduced the licence of language, and still more considerably increased the dose of wit

—the Reeve's and Miller's sections of the *Canterbury Tales*—the lack of decency is very often accompanied by no lack of sense. And a certain proportion, including some of the very best in a literary point of view, are not exposed to the charge of any impropriety either of language or of subject.

Definition and subjects.

There is, indeed, no special reason why the *fabliau* should be "improper" (except for the greater ease of getting a laugh) according to its definition, which is capable of being drawn rather more sharply than is always the case with literary kinds. It is a short tale in verse—almost invariably octosyllabic couplets—dealing, for the most part from the comic point of view, with incidents of ordinary life. This naturally admits of the widest possible diversity of subject: indeed it is only by sticking to the condition of "ordinary life" that the *fabliau* can be differentiated from the short romance on one side and the allegoric beast-fable on the other. Even as it is, its most recent editors have admitted among their 157 examples not a few which are simple *jeux d'esprit* on the things of humanity, and others which are in effect short romances and nothing else. Of these last is the best known of all the non-Rabelaisian *fabliaux*, "Le Vair Palefroi," which has been Englished by Leigh Hunt and shortly paraphrased by Peacock, while examples of the former may be found without turning very long over even one of MM. de Montaiglon and Raynaud's pretty and learned volumes. A very large proportion, as might be expected, draw their comic interest from satire on priests, on women, or on

both together; and this very general character of the *fabliaux* (which, it must be remembered, were performed or recited by the very same *jongleurs* who conducted the publication of the *chansons de geste* and the romances) was no doubt partly the result and partly the cause of the persistent dislike and disfavour with which the Church regarded the profession of jonglerie. It is, indeed, from the *fabliaux* themselves that we learn much of what we know about the *jongleurs;* and one of not the least amusing[1] deals with the half-clumsy, half-satiric boasts of two members of the order, who misquote the titles of their *répertoire,* make by accident or intention ironic comments on its contents, and in short do *not* magnify their office in a very modern spirit of humorous writing.

Every now and then, too, we find, in the half-random and wholly scurrile slander of womankind, a touch of real humour, of the humour that has feeling behind it, as here, where a sufficiently ribald variation on the theme of the "Ephesian matron" ends—

> "Por ce teng-je celui à fol
> Qui trop met en fame sa cure;
> Fame est de trop foible nature,
> De noient rit, de noient pleure,
> Fame aime et het en trop poi d'eure:
> Tost est ses talenz remuez,
> Qui fame croit, si est desvès."

So too, again, in "La Housse Partie," a piece which perhaps ranks next to the "Vair Palefroi" in general

[1] "Les Deux Bordeors [bourders, jesters] Ribaux."

estimation, there is neither purely romantic interest, as in the Palfrey, nor the interest of "the pity of it," as in the piece just quoted; but an ethical purpose, showing out of the mouth of babes and sucklings the danger of filial ingratitude.

But, as a general rule, there is little that is serious in these frequently graceless but generally amusing compositions. There is a curious variety about them, and incidentally a crowd of lively touches of common life. The fisherman of the Seine starts for his day's work or sport with oar and tackle; the smith plies the forge; the bath plays a considerable part in the stories, and we learn that it was not an unknown habit to eat when bathing, which seems to be an unwise attempt to double luxuries. A short sketch of mediæval catering might be got out of the *fabliaux*, where figure not merely the usual dainties—capons, partridges, pies well peppered—but eels salted, dried, and then roasted, or more probably grilled, as we grill kippered salmon. Here we have a somewhat less grimy original—perhaps it was actually the original—of Skelton's "Tunning of Elinor Rumming"; and in many places other patterns, the later reproductions of which are well known to readers of Boccaccio and the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* of La Fontaine and his followers. Title after title—"Du Prestre Crucifié," "Du Prestre et d'Alison," &c.—tells us that the clergy are going to be lampooned. Sometimes, where the fun is no worse than childish, it is childish enough—plays on words, jokes on English mispronunciation of French, and so forth. But it very seldom, though it

is sometimes intolerably nasty, approaches the sheer drivel which appears in some English would-be comic writing of the Middle Ages, or the very early Renaissance—such, for instance, as most of that in the prose "Pleasant Historie of Thomas of Reading,"[1] which the late Mr Thoms was pleased to call a romance. Yet the actual stuff of "Thomas of Reading" is very much of the nature of the *fabliaux* (except of course the tragical part, which happens to be the only good part), and so the difference of the handling is noteworthy. So it is also in English verse-work of the kind—the "Hunting of the Hare"[2] and the like—to take examples necessarily a little later than our time.

Effect of the fabliaux on language.

For in these curious compositions the *esprit Gaulois* found itself completely at home; indeed some have held that here it hit upon its most characteristic and peculiar development. The wonderful faculty for expression — for giving, if not the supreme, yet the adequate and technically masterly dress to any kind of literary production — which has been the note of French literature throughout, and which was never more its note than at this time, enabled the language, as we have seen and shall see, to keep as by an easy sculling movement far ahead of all its competitors. But in other departments, with one or two exceptions, the union of temper and craft, of

[1] *Early English Prose Romances* (2d ed., London, 1858), i. 71. The text of this is only Deloney's and sixteenth century, but much of the matter must be far earlier.

[2] Weber, iii. 177.

inspiration and execution, was not quite perfect. Here there was no misalliance. As the language lost the rougher, fresher music which gives such peculiar attraction to the *chansons*, as it disused itself to the varied trills, the half-inarticulate warblings which constitute the charm of the lyrics, so it acquired the precision, the flexibility, the *netteté*, which satiric treatment of the follies and evil chances of life, the oddities of manners and morals, require. It became bright, if a little hard, easy, if a little undistinguished, capable of slyness, of innuendo, of "malice," but not quite so capable as it had been of the finer and vaguer suggestions and aspirations.

And on narrative.

Above all, these *fabliaux* served as an exercise-ground for the practice in which French was to become almost if not quite supreme, the practice of narrative. In the longer romances, which for a century or a century and a half preceded the *fabliaux*, the art of narration, as has been more than once noticed, was little attended to, and indeed had little scope. The *chansons* had a common form, or something very like it, which almost dispensed the *trouvère* from devoting much pains to the individual conduct of the story. The most abrupt transitions were accustomed, indeed expected; minor incidents received very little attention; the incessant fighting secured the attention of the probable hearers by itself; the more grandiose and striking incidents—the crowning of Prince Louis and the indignation of William at his sister's ingratitude,

for instance—were not "engineered" or led up to in any way, but left to act in mass and by assault.

Conditions of fabliau-writing.

The smaller range and more delicate—however indelicate—argument of the *fabliaux* not only invited but almost necessitated a different kind of handling. The story had to draw to point in (on an average) two or three hundred lines at most—there are *fabliaux* of a thousand lines, and *fabliaux* of thirty or forty, but the average is as just stated. The incidents had to be adjusted for best effect, neither too many nor too few. The treatment had to be mainly provocative—an appeal in some cases by very coarse means indeed to very coarse nerves, in others by finer devices addressed to senses more tickle o' the sere. And so grew up that unsurpassed and hardly matched product the French short story, where, if it is in perfection, hardly a word is thrown away, and not a word missed that is really wanted.

The appearance of irony.

The great means for doing this in literature is irony; and irony appears in the *fabliaux* as it had hardly done since Lucian. Take, for instance, this opening of a piece, the rest of which is at least as irreverent, considerably less quotable, but not much less pointed:—

> "Quant Dieus ot estoré lo monde,
> Si con il est à la reonde,
> Et quanque il convit dedans,
> Trois ordres establir de genz,
> Et fist el siecle demoranz
> Chevaliers, clers et laboranz.

Les chevalers toz asena
As terres, et as clers dona
Les aumosnes et les dimages ;
Puis asena les laborages
As laborenz, por laborer.
Qant ce ot fet, sanz demeler
D'iluec parti, et s'en ala."

What two orders were left, and how the difficulty of there being nothing left for them was got over, may be found by the curious in the seventy-sixth *fabliau* of the third volume of the collection so often quoted. But the citation given will show that there is nothing surprising in the eighteenth-century history, literary or poetical, of a country which could produce such a piece, certainly not later than the thirteenth. Even Voltaire could not put the thing more neatly or with a more complete freedom from superfluous words.

Fables proper.

It will doubtless have been observed that the *fabliau*—though the word is simply *fabula* in one of its regular Romance metamorphoses, and though the method is sufficiently Æsopic—is not a "fable" in the sense more especially assigned to the term. Yet the mediæval languages, especially French and Latin, were by no means destitute of fables properly so called. On the contrary, it would appear that it was precisely during our present period that the rather meagre Æsopisings of Phædrus and Babrius were expanded into the fuller collection of beast-stories which exists in various forms, the chief of them being the *Ysopet* (the name generally given to the class in Romance) of *Marie de France*,

the somewhat later *Lyoner Ysopet* (as its editor, Dr Förster, calls it), and the original of this latter, the Latin elegiacs of the so-called *Anonymus Neveleti*.[1] The collection of Marie is interesting, at least, because of the author, whose more famous Lais, composed, it would seem, at the Court of Henry III. of England about the meeting of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and forming a sort of offshoot less of the substance of the Arthurian story than of its spirit, are among the most delightful relics of mediæval poetry. But the Lyons book perhaps exhibits more of the characteristic which, evident enough in the *fabliau* proper, discovers, after passing as by a channel through the beast-fable, its fullest and most famous form in the world-renowned *Romance of Reynard the Fox*, one of the capital works of the Middle Ages, and with the sister but contrasted *Romance of the Rose*, as much the distinguishing literary product of the thirteenth century as the romances proper—Carlovingian, Arthurian, and Classical—are of the twelfth.

Not, of course, that the antiquity of the Reynard story itself[2] does not mount far higher than the thirteenth century. No two things are more remarkable

[1] Works of Marie; ed. Roquefort, Paris, 1820; or ed. Warnke, Halle, 1885. The *Lyoner Ysopet*, with the *Anonymus*; ed. Förster, Heilbronn, 1882.

[2] *Roman du* (should be *de*) *Renart*: ed. Méon and Chabaille, 5 vols., Paris, 1826-35; ed. Martin, 3 vols. text and 1 critical observations, Strasburg, 1882-87. *Reincke de Vos*, ed. Prien, Halle, 1887, with a valuable bibliography. *Reinaert*, ed. Martin, Paderborn, 1874. *Reinardus Vulpes*, ed. Mone, Stuttgart, 1834. *Reinhart Fuchs*, ed. Grimm, Berlin, 1832. On the *story* there is perhaps nothing better than Carlyle, as quoted ~~supra~~ above

as results of that comparative and simultaneous study of literature, to which this series hopes to give some little assistance, than the way in which, on the one hand, a hundred years seem to be in the Middle Ages but a day, in the growth of certain kinds, and on the other a day sometimes appears to do the work of a hundred years. We have seen how in the last two or three decades of the twelfth century the great Arthurian legend seems suddenly to fill the whole literary scene, after being previously but a meagre chronicler's record or invention. The growth of the Reynard story, though to some extent contemporaneous, was slower; but it was really the older of the two. Before the middle of this century, as we have seen, there was really no Arthurian story worthy the name; it would seem that by that time the Reynard legend had already taken not full but definite form in Latin, and there is no reasonable reason for scepticism as to its existence in vernacular tradition, though perhaps not in vernacular writing, for many years, perhaps for more than one century, earlier.

Reynard the Fox.

It was not to be expected but that so strange, so interesting, and so universally popular a story as that of King Noble and his not always loving subjects, should have been made, as usual, the battle-ground of literary fancy and of that general tendency of mankind to ferocity, which, unluckily, the study of *belles lettres* does not seem very appreciably to soften. Assisted by the usual fallacy of antedating MSS. in the early days of palæographic study, and by their prepossessions as Germans, some early students

Order of texts.

of the Reynard story made out much too exclusive and too early claims, as to possession by right of invention, for the country in which Reynard has no doubt, for the last four centuries or so, been much more of a really popular hero than anywhere else. Investigation and comparison, however, have had more healing effects here than in other cases; and since the acknowledgment of the fact that the very early Middle High German version of Henry the Glichezare, itself of the end of the twelfth century, is a translation from the French, there has not been much serious dispute about the order of the Reynard romances as we actually have them. That is to say, if the Latin *Isengrimus* — the oldest *Reinardus Vulpes* — of 1150 or thereabouts is actually the oldest *text*, the older branches of the French *Renart* pretty certainly come next, with the High German following a little later, and the Low German *Reincke de Vos* and the Flemish *Reinaert* a little later still. The Southern Romance nations do not seem—indeed the humour is essentially Northern—to have adopted Reynard with as much enthusiasm as they showed towards the Romances; and our English forms were undoubtedly late adaptations from foreign originals.

Place of origin.

If, however, this account of the texts may be said to be fairly settled, the same cannot of course be said as to the origin of the story. Here there are still champions of the German claim, whose number is increased by those who stickle for a definite "Low" German origin. Some French patriots, with a stronger case than they generally have, still

maintain the story to be purely French in inception. I have not myself seen any reason to change the opinion I formed some fifteen years ago, to the effect that it seems likely that the original language of the epic is French, but French of a Walloon or Picard dialect, and that it was written somewhere between the Seine and the Rhine.

The character and accomplishment of the story, however, are matters of much more purely literary interest than the rather barren question of the probable—it is not likely that it will ever be the proved—date or place of origin of this famous thing. The fable in general, and the beast-fable in particular, are among the very oldest and most universal of the known forms of literature. A fresh and special development of it might have taken place in any country at any time. It did, as a matter of fact, take place somewhere about the twelfth century or earlier, and somewhere in the central part of the northern coast district of the old Frankish empire.

The French form.

As usual with mediæval work, when it once took hold on the imagination of writers and hearers, the bulk is very great, especially in the French forms, which, taking them altogether, cannot fall much short of a hundred thousand lines. This total, however, includes developments—*Le Couronnement Renart*, *Renart le Nouvel*, and, later than our present period, a huge and still not very well-known thing called *Renart le Contrefait*, which are distinct additions to the first conception of the story. Yet even that first conception is not a story in the single sense.

Its thirty thousand lines or thereabouts are divided into a considerable number of what are called *branches*, attributed to authors sometimes anonymous, sometimes named, but never, except in the one case of *Renart le Bestourné*, known.[1] And it is always difficult and sometimes impossible to determine in what relation these branches stand to the main trunk, or which of them *is* the main trunk The two editors of the *Roman*, Méon and Herr Martin, arrange them in different orders; and I do not think it would be in the least difficult to make out a good case for an order, or even a large number of orders, different still.[2]

By comparison, however, with the versions in other languages, it seems not very doubtful that the complaint of Isengrim the Wolf as to the outrages committed by Reynard on the complainant's personal comfort, and the honour of Hersent his wife—a complaint laid formally before King Noble the Lion—forms, so far as any single thing can be said to form it, the basis and beginning of the Reynard story. The multiplication of complaints by other beasts, the sufferings inflicted by Reynard on the messengers sent to summon him to Court, and his escapes, by mixture of fraud and force, when he is no longer able to avoid putting in an appearance, supply the natural continuation.

[1] This, which is not so much a branch as an independent *fabliau*, is attributed to Rutebœuf, *v. infra.*

[2] The Teutonic versions are consolidated into a more continuous story. But of the oldest High German version, that of the Glichezare, we have but part, and *Reincke de Vos* does not reach seven thousand verses. The French forms are therefore certainly to be preferred.

But from this, at least in the French versions, the branches diverge, cross, and repeat or contradict each other with an altogether bewildering freedom. Sometimes, for long passages together, as in the interesting fytte, "How Reynard hid himself among the Skins,"[1] the author seems to forget the general purpose altogether, and to devote himself to something quite different—in this case the description of the daily life and pursuits of a thirteenth-century sportsman of easy means. Often the connection with the general story is kept only by the introduction of the most obvious and perfunctory devices—an intrigue with Dame Hersent, a passing trick played on Isengrim, and so forth.

Its complications.

Nevertheless the whole is knit together, to a degree altogether unusual in a work of such magnitude, due to many different hands, by an extraordinary unity of tone and temper. This tone and this temper are to some extent conditioned by the Rise of Allegory, the great feature, in succession to the outburst of Romance, of our present period. We do not find in the original *Renart* branches the abstracting of qualities and the personification of abstractions which appear in later developments, and which are due to the popularity of the *Romance of the Rose*, if it be not more strictly correct to say that the popularity of the *Romance of the Rose* was due to the taste for allegory. Jacquemart Giélée, the auther of *Renart le Nouvel*, might personify *Renardie* and work his beast-personages into knights of

Unity of spirit.

The Rise of Allegory.

[1] Méon, iii. 82; Martin, ii. 43.

tourney; the clerk of Troyes, who later wrote *Renart le Contrefait*, might weave a sort of encyclopædia into his piece. But the authors of the "Ancien Renart" knew better. With rare lapses, they exhibit wonderful art in keeping their characters beasts, while assigning to them human arts; or rather, to put the matter with more correctness, they pass over the not strictly beast-like performances of Renart and the others with such entire unconcern, with such a perfect freedom from tedious after-thought of explanation, that no sense of incongruity occurs. The illustrations of Méon's *Renart*, which show us the fox painfully clasping in his forelegs a stick four times his own length, show the inferiority of the nineteenth century. Renart may beat *le vilain* (everybody beats the poor *vilain*) as hard as he likes in the old French text; it comes all naturally. A neat copper-plate engraving, in the best style of sixty or seventy years ago, awakes distrust.

The satire of Renart.

The general fable is so familiar that not much need be said about it. But it is, I think, not unfair to say that the German and Flemish versions, from the latter of which Caxton's and all later English forms seem to be copied, are, if better adjusted to a continuous story, less saturated with the quintessence of satiric criticism of life than the French *Renart*. The fault of excessive coarseness of thought and expression, which has been commented on in the *fabliaux*, recurs here to the fullest extent; but it is atoned for and sweetened by an even greater measure of irony. As to the definite purposes of this irony it

would not be well to be too sure. The passage quoted on a former page will show with what completely fearless satire the *trouvères* treated Church and State, God and Man. It is certain that they had no love of any kind for the clergy, who were not merely their rivals but their enemies; and it is not probable they had much for the knightly order, who were their patrons. But it is never in the very least degree safe to conclude, in a mediæval writer, from that satire of abuses, which is so frequent, to the distinct desire of reform or revolution, which is so rare. The satire of the *Renart* — and it is all the more delightful — is scarcely in the smallest degree political, is only in an interesting archæological way of the time ecclesiastical or religious; but it is human, perennial, contemptuous of mere time and circumstance, throughout.

The Fox himself.

It cannot, no doubt, be called kindly satire—French satire very rarely is. Renart, the only hero, though a hero sometimes uncommonly hard bested, is a furred and four-footed Jonathan Wild. He appears to have a creditable paternal affection for Masters Rovel, Percehaie, and the other cubs; and despite his own extreme licence of conjugal conduct, only one or two branches make Dame Hermeline, his wife, either false to him or ill-treated by him. In these respects, as in the other that he is scarcely ever outwitted, he has the advantage of Jonathan. But otherwise I think our great eighteenth-century *maufès* was a better fellow than Renart, because he was much less purely malignant. I do not think that Jonathan often said his prayers; but he probably never went to

bed, as Reynard did upon the hay-mow, after performing his devotions in a series of elaborate curses upon all his enemies. The fox is so clever that one never dislikes him, and generally admires him; but he is entirely compact of all that is worst, not merely in beast-nature but in humanity. And it is a triumph of the writers that, this being so, we at once can refrain from disliking him, and are not tempted to like him illegitimately.

His circle.

The *trouvères* did not trouble themselves to work out any complete character among the many whom they grouped round this great personage; but they left none without touches of vivification and verisimilitude. The female beasts—Dame Fière or Orgueilleuse, the lioness, Hersent, the she-wolf, Hermeline, the vixen, and the rest—are too much tinged with that stock slander of feminine character which was so common in the Middle Ages. And each is rather too much of a type, a fault which may be also found with their lords. Yet all of these—Bruin and Brichemer, Coart and Chanticleer, Tybert and Primaut, Hubert and Roonel — have the brightest touches, not merely of the coarsely labelling kind, but of the kind that makes a character alive. And, save as concerns the unfortunate capons and *gelines* whom Renart consumes, so steadily and with such immunity, it cannot be said that their various misfortunes are ever incurred without a valid excuse in poetical justice. Isengrim, the chief of them all, is an especial case in point. Although he is Chief Constable, he is just as much of a rascal and a malefactor

as Renart himself, with the additional crime of stupidity. One is disposed to believe that, if domiciliary visits were made to their various abodes, Malpertuis would by no means stand alone as a bad example of a baronial abode. Renart is indeed constantly spoken of as Noble's "baron." Yet it would be a great mistake to take this epic, as it has been sometimes taken, for a protest against baronial oppression. A sense of this, no doubt, counts—as do senses of many other oppressions that are done under the sun. But it is the satire on life as a whole that is uppermost; and that is what makes the poem, or collection of poems, so remarkable. It is hard, coarse, prosaic except for the range and power of its fancy, libellous enough on humanity from behind its stalking-brutes. But it is true, if an exaggeration of the truth; and its constant hugging of the facts of life supplies the strangest possible contrast to the graceful but shadowy land of romance which we have left in former chapters. We all know the burial-scene of Launcelot—later, no doubt, in its finest form, but in suggestion and spirit of the time with which we are dealing. Let us now consider briefly the burial-scene of Renart.

The burial of Renart.

When Méon, the excellent first editor of the collection, put, as was reason, the branch entitled "La Mort Renart" last, he was a little troubled by the consideration that several of the beasts whom in former branches Renart himself has brought to evil ends reappear and take part in his funeral. But this scarcely argued a sufficient appreciation of the true spirit of the cycle. The beasts, though per-

fectly lively abstractions, are, after all, abstractions in a way, and you cannot kill an abstraction. Nay, the author, with a really grand final touch of the pervading satire which is the key of the whole, gives us to understand at the last that Renart (though he has died not once, but twice, in the course of the *fytte*) is not really dead at all, and that when Dame Hermeline persuades the complaisant ambassadors to report to the Lion-King that they have seen the tomb with Renart inscribed upon it, the fact was indeed true but the meaning false, inasmuch as it was another Renart altogether. Indeed the true Renart is clearly immortal.

Nevertheless, as it is his mission, and that of his poets, to satirise all the things of Life, so must Death also be satirised in his person and with his aid. The branch, though it is probably not a very early one, is of an admirable humour, and an uncompromising truth after a fashion, which makes the elaborate realism and pessimism of some other periods look singularly poor, thin, and conventional. The author, for the keeping of his story, begins by showing the doomed fox more than a little "failed"—the shadow of fate dwelling coldly beforehand on him. He is badly mauled at the opening (though, it is true, he takes vengeance for it) by monks whose hen-roost he is robbing, and when he meets Coart the hare, *sur son destrier*, with a *vilain* whom he has captured (this is a mark of lateness, some of the verisimilitude of the early time having been dropped), he plays him no tricks. Nay, when Isengrim and he begin to play chess

he is completely worsted by his ancient butt, who at last takes, in consequence of an imprudent stake of the penniless Fox, a cruel but appropriate vengeance for his former wrongs. Renart is comforted to some extent by his old love, Queen Fière the lioness; but pain, and wounds, and defeat have brought him near death, and he craves a priest. Bernard the Ass, Court-Archpriest, is ready, and admonishes the penitent with the most becoming gravity and unction. The confession, as might be expected, is something impudent; and the penitent very frankly stipulates that if he gets well his oath of repentance is not to stand good. But it looks as if he were to be taken at the worse side of his word, and he falls into a swoon which is mistaken for death. The Queen laments him with perfect openness; but the excellent Noble is a philosophic husband as well as a good king, and sets about the funeral of Renart

("Jamais si bon baron n'avai,"

says he) with great earnestness. Hermeline and her orphans are fetched from Malpertuis, and the widow makes heartrending moan, as does Cousin Grimbart when the news is brought to him. The vigils of the dead are sung, and all the beasts who have hated Renart, and whom he has affronted in his lifetime, assemble in decent mourning and perform the service, with the ceremony of the most well-trained choir. Afterwards they "wake" the corpse through the night a little noisily; but on the morrow the obsequies are resumed "in the best and most orgilous manner," with a series of grave-side speeches which read like a de-

signed satire on those common in France at the present day. A considerable part of the good Archpriest's own sermon is unfortunately not reproducible in sophisticated times; but every one can appreciate his tender reference to the deceased's prowess in daring all dangers—

> "Pur avoir vostre ventre plaine,
> Et pour porter à Hermeline
> Vostre fame, coc ou geline
> Chapon, ou oie, ou gras oison"—

for, as he observes in a sorrowful parenthesis, "anything was in season if *you* could only get hold of it." Brichemer the Stag notes how Reynard had induced the monks to observe their vows by making them go to bed late and get up early to watch their fowls. But when Bruin the Bear has dug his grave, and holy water has been thrown on him, and Bruin is just going to shovel the earth — behold! Reynard wakes up, catches Chanticleer (who is holding the censer) by the neck, and bolts into a thick pleached plantation. Still, despite this resurrection, his good day is over, and a levée *en masse* of the Lion's people soon surrounds him, catches him up, and forces him to release Chanticleer, who, nothing afraid, challenges him to mortal combat on fair terms, beats him, and leaves him for dead in the lists. And though he manages to pay Rohart the Raven and his wife (who think to strip his body) in kind, he reaches Malpertuis dead-beat; and we feel that even his last shift and the faithful complaisance of Grimbart will never leave him quite the same Fox again.

The defects which distinguish almost all mediæval poetry are no doubt discoverable here. There is some sophistication of the keeping in the episodes of Coart and Chanticleer, and the termination is almost too audacious in the sort of choice of happy or unhappy ending, triumph or defeat for the hero, which it leaves us. Yet this very audacity suits the whole scheme; and the part dealing with the death (or swoon) and burial is assuredly one of the best things of its kind in French, almost one of the best things in or out of it. The contrast between the evident delight of the beasts at getting rid of Renart and their punctilious discharge of ceremonial duties, the grave parody of rites and conventions, remind us more of Swift or Lucian than of any French writer, even Rabelais or Voltaire. It happened that some ten or twelve years had passed between the time when the present writer had last opened *Renart* (except for mere reference now and then) and the time when he refreshed his memory of it for the purposes of the present volume. It is not always in such cases that the second judgment exactly confirms the first; but here, not merely in the instance of this particular branch but almost throughout, I can honestly say that I put down the *Roman de Renart* with even a higher idea of its literary merit than that with which I had taken it up.

The Romance of the Rose.

The second great romance which distinguishes the thirteenth century in France stands, as we may say, to one side of the *Roman de Renart* as the *fabliaux* do to the other side. But, though

complex in fewer pieces, the *Roman de la Rose*[1] is, like the *Roman de Renart*, a complex, not a single work; and its two component parts are distinguished from one another by a singular change of tone and temper. It is the later and larger part of the *Rose* which brings it close to *Renart:* the smaller and earlier is conceived in a spirit entirely different, though not entirely alien, and one which, reinforcing the satiric drift of the *fabliaux* and *Renart* itself, influenced almost the entire literary production in *belles lettres* at least, and sometimes out of them, for more than two centuries throughout Europe.

At no time probably except in the Middle Ages would Jean de Meung, who towards the end of the thirteenth century took up the scheme which William of Lorris had left unfinished forty years earlier, have thought of continuing the older poem instead of beginning a fresh one for himself. And at no other time probably would any one, choosing to make a continuation, have carried it out by putting such entirely different wine into the same bottle. Of William himself little is known, or rather nothing, except that he must have been, as his continuator certainly was, a native of the Loire district; so that the *Rose* is a product of Central, not, like *Renart*, of Northern France, and exhibits, especially in the

[1] Ed. Michel. Paris, 1864. One of the younger French scholars, who, under the teaching of M. Gaston Paris, have taken in hand various sections of mediæval literature, M. Langlois, has bestowed much attention on the *Rose*, and has produced a monograph on it, *Origines et Sources du Roman de la Rose*. Paris, 1890.

Lorris portion, an approximation to Provençal spirit and form.

The use of personification and abstraction, especially in relation to love-matters, had not been unknown in the troubadour poetry itself and in the northern verse, lyrical and other, which grew up beside or in succession to it. It rose no doubt partly, if not wholly, from the constant habit in sermons and theological treatises of treating the Seven Deadly Sins and other abstractions as entities. Every devout or undevout frequenter of the Church in those times knew "Accidia"[1] and Avarice, Anger and Pride, as bodily rather than ghostly enemies, furnished with a regular uniform, appearing in recognised circumstances and companies, acting like human beings. And these were by no means the only sacred uses of allegory.

William of Lorris and Jean de Meung.

When William of Lorris, probably at some time in the fourth decade of the thirteenth century, set to work to write the *Romance of the Rose*, he adjusted this allegorical handling to the purposes of love-poetry with an ingenious intricacy never before attained. It has been the fashion almost ever since the famous Romance was rescued from the ignorant and contemptuous oblivion into which it had fallen, to praise Jean de Meung's part at the expense of that due to William of Lorris. But this is hard to justify either on directly æsthetic or on historical principles of criticism. In the first

[1] "Sloth" is a rather unhappy substitute for *Accidia* (ἀκηδεια), the gloomy and impious despair and indifference to good living and even life, of which sloth itself is but a partial result.

place, there can be no question that, vitally as he changed the spirit, Jean de Meung was wholly indebted to his predecessor for the form—the form of half-pictorial, half-poetic allegory, which is the great characteristic of the poem, and which gave it the enormous attraction and authority that it so long possessed. In the second place, clever as Jean de Meung is, and more thoroughly in harmony as he may be with the *esprit gaulois*, his work is on a much lower literary level than that of his predecessor. Jean de Meung in the latter and larger part of the poem simply stuffs into it stock satire on women, stock learning, stock semi-pagan morality. He is, it is true, tolerably actual; he shares with the *fabliau*-writers and the authors of *Renart* a firm grasp on the perennial rascalities and meannesses of human nature. The negative commendation that he is "no fool" may be very heartily bestowed upon him. But he is a little commonplace and more than a little prosaic. There is amusement in him, but no charm: and where (that is to say, in large spaces) there is no amusement, there is very little left. Nor, except for the inappropriate exhibition of learning and the strange misuse of poetical (at least of verse) allegory, can he be said to be eminently characteristic of his own time. His very truth to general nature prevents that; while his literary ability, considerable as it is, is hardly sufficient to clothe his universally true reflections in a universally acceptable form.

The first four thousand and odd lines of the Romance, on the other hand—for beyond them it is

known that the work of William of Lorris does not go—contain matter which may seem but little connected with criticism of life, arranged in a form completely out of fashion. But they, beyond all question, contain also the first complete presentation of a scheme, a mode, an atmosphere, which for centuries enchained, because they expressed, the poetical thought of the time, and which, for those who can reach the right point of view, can develop the right organs of appreciation, possess an extraordinary, indeed a unique charm. I should rank this first part of the *Roman de la Rose* high among the books which if a man does not appreciate he cannot even distantly understand the Middle Ages; indeed there is perhaps no single one which on the serious side contains such a master-key to their inmost recesses.

The first part.

To comprehend a Gothic cathedral the *Rose* should be as familiar as the *Dies Iræ*. For the spirit of it is indeed, though faintly "decadent," even more the mediæval spirit than that of the Arthurian legend, precisely for the reason that it is less universal, less of humanity generally, more of this particular phase of humanity. And as it is opposed to, rather than complementary of, the religious side of the matter in one direction, so it opposes and completes the satirical side, of which we have heard so much in this chapter, and the purely fighting and adventurous part, which we have dealt with in others, not excluding by any means in this half-reflective, half-contrasting office, the philosophical side also. Yet when men pray and fight, when they sneer and speculate, they

Its capital value.

are constrained to be very like themselves and each other. They are much freer in their dreams: and the *Romance of the Rose*, if it has not much else of life, is like it in this way—that it too is a dream.

As such it quite honestly holds itself out. The author lays it down, supporting himself with the opinion of another "qui ot nom macrobes," that dreams are quite serious things. At any rate he will tell a dream of his own, a dream which befell him in his twentieth year, a dream wherein was nothing

> "Qui avenu trestout ne soit
> Si com le songes racantoit."

And if any one wishes to know how the romance telling this dream shall be called—

> "Ce est li Rommanz de la Rose,
> Ou l'ars d'amorz est tote enclose."

The poem itself opens with a description of a dewy morn in May, a description then not so hackneyed as, chiefly from this very instance, it afterwards became, and in itself at once "setting," so to speak, the frame of gracious decorative imagery in which the poet works. He "threaded a silver needle" (an odd but not unusual mediæval pastime was sewing stitches in the sleeve) and strolled, *cousant ses manches*, towards a river-bank. Then, after bathing his face and seeing the bright gravel flashing through the water, he continued his stroll down-stream, till he saw in front of him a great park (for this translates the mediæval *verger* much better than "orchard"), on the wall of which were portrayed

The rose-garden.

certain images[1]—Hatred, Felony, Villainy, Covetousness, Avarice, Envy, Sadness, Old Age, Hypocrisy, and Poverty. These personages, who strike the allegoric and personifying note of the poem, are described at varying length, the last three being perhaps the best. Despite these uninviting figures, the Lover (as he is soon called) desires violently to enter the park; but for a long time he can find no way in, till at length Dame Oyseuse (Idleness) admits him at a postern. She is a very attractive damsel herself; and she tells the Lover that Delight and all his Court haunt the park, and that he has had the ugly images made, apparently as skeletons at the feast, to heighten, not to dash, enjoyment. Entering, the Lover thinks he is in the Earthly Paradise, and after a time he finds the fair company listening to the singing of Dame Lyesse (Pleasure), with much dancing, music, and entertainment of *jongleurs* and *jongleresses* to help pass the time.

Courtesy asks him to join in the *karole* (dance), and he does so, giving full description of her, of Lyesse, of Delight, and of the God of Love himself, with his bow-bearer Sweet-Glances, who carries in each hand five arrows—in the right Beauty, Simpleness, Frankness, Companionship, Fair-Seeming; in the left Pride, Villainy,[2] Shame, Despair, and "New-Thought"—

[1] "Seven" says the verse chapter-heading, which is a feature of the poem; but the actual text does not mention the number, and it will be seen that there were in fact *ten*. The author of the headings was no doubt thinking of the Seven Deadly Sins.

[2] *Vilenie* is never an easy word to translate: it means general misconduct and disagreeable behaviour.

i.e., Fickleness. Other personages — sometimes with the same names, sometimes with different — follow in the train; Cupid watches the Lover that he may take shot at him, and the tale is interrupted by an episode giving the story of Narcissus. Meanwhile the Lover has seen among the flowers of the garden one rose-bud on which he fixes special desires. The thorns keep him off; and Love, having him at vantage, empties the right-hand quiver on him. He yields himself prisoner, and a dialogue between captive and captor follows. Love locks his heart with a gold key; and after giving him a long sermon on his duties, illustrated from the Round Table romances and elsewhere, vanishes, leaving him in no little pain, and still unable to get at the Rose. Suddenly in his distress there appears to him

> "Un valet buen et avenant
> Bel-Acueil se faisoit clamer,"

and it seems that he was the son of Courtesy.

Bialacoil (to give him his Chaucerian [1] Englishing) is most obliging, and through his help the Lover has nearly reached the Rose, when an ugly personage named Danger in turn makes his appearance. Up to this time there is no very important difficulty in the interpretation of the allegory; but the learned are not at one as to what "Danger" means.

"*Danger.*"

[1] I am well aware of everything that has been said about and against the Chaucerian authorship of the English *Rose*. But until the learned philologists who deny that authorship in whole or in part agree a little better among themselves, they must allow literary critics at least to suspend their judgment.

The older explanation, and the one to which I myself still incline as most natural and best suiting what follows, is that Danger is the representative of the beloved one's masculine and other guardians—her husband, father, brother, mother, and so forth. Others, however, see in him only subjective obstacles—the coyness, or caprice, or coquettishness of the Beloved herself. But these never troubled a true lover to any great extent; and besides they seem to have been provided for by the arrows in the left hand of Love's bow-bearer, and by Shame (*v. infra*). At any rate Danger's proceedings are of a most kill-joy nature. He starts from his hiding-place—

> "Grans fu, et noirs et hericiés,
> S'ot les iex rouges comme feus,
> Le nés froncié, le vis hideus,
> Et s'escrie comme forcenés."

He abuses Bialacoil for bringing the Lover to the Rose, and turns the Lover out of the park, while Bialacoil flies.

"Reason." To the disconsolate suitor appears Reason, and does not speak comfortable words. She is described as a middle-aged lady of a comely and dignified appearance, crowned, and made specially in God's image and likeness. She tells him that if he had not put himself under the guidance of Idleness, Love would not have wounded him; that besides Danger, he has made her own daughter Shame his foe, and also Male-Bouche (Scandal, Gossip, Evil-Speaking), the third and most formidable guardian of the Rose.

He ought never to have surrendered to Love. In the service of that power

> "il a plus poine
> Que n'ont hermite ne blanc moine ;
> La poine en est démesurée,
> Et la joie a courte durée."

The Lover does not take this sermon well. He is Love's: she may go about her business, which she does. He bethinks him that he has a companion, Amis (the Friend), who has always been faithful; and he will go to him in his trouble. Indeed Love had bidden him do so. The Friend is obliging and consoling, and says that he knows Danger. His bark is worse than his bite, and if he is spoken softly to he will relent. The Lover takes the advice with only partial success. Danger, at first robustious, softens so far as to say that he has no objection to the Lover loving, only he had better keep clear of his roses. The Friend represents this as an important point gained; and as the next step Pity and Frankness go as his ambassadresses to Danger, who allows Bialacoil to return to him and take him once more to see the Rose, more beautiful than ever. He even, assisted by Venus, is allowed to kiss his love.

This is very agreeable: but it arouses the two other guardians of whom Reason has vainly warned him, Shame and Evil-Speaking, or Scandal. The latter wakes Jealousy, Fear follows, and Fear and Shame stir up Danger. He keeps closer watch, Jealousy digs a trench round the rose-bush and builds a tower where Bialacoil is immured: and

"Shame" and "Scandal."

the Lover, his case only made worse by the remembered savour of the Rose on his lips,[1] is left helpless outside. But as the rubric of the poem has it—

> "Cyendroit trespassa Guillaume
> De Lorris, et n'en fist plus pseaulme."

The later poem.

The work which forty years later Jean de Meung (some say at royal suggestion) added to the piece, so as to make it five times its former length, has been spoken of generally already, and needs less notice in detail. Jean de Meung takes up the theme by once more introducing Reason, whose remonstrances, with the Lover's answers, take nearly half as much room as the whole story hitherto. Then reappears the Friend, who is twice as long-winded as Reason, and brings the tale up to more than ten thousand lines already. At last Love himself takes some pity of his despairing vassal, and besieges the tower where Bialacoil is confined. This leads to the introduction of the most striking and characteristic figure of the second part, *Faux-Semblant*, a variety of Reynard. Bialacoil is freed: but Danger still guards the Rose. Love, beaten, invokes the help of his mother, who sends Nature and Genius to his aid. They talk more than anybody else. But Venus has to come herself before Danger is vanquished and the Lover plucks the Rose.

"False-Seeming."

[1] "Car ge suis a greignor meschief
Por la joie que j'ai perdue.
Que s'onques ne l'éussi éue."

Dante undoubtedly had this in his mind when he wrote the immortal *Nessun maggior dolore*. All this famous passage, l. 4557 *sq.*, is admirable.

The appeal of this famous poem is thus twofold, though the allegorical form in which the appeal is conveyed is the same. In the first part all the love-poetry of troubadour and *trouvère* is gathered up and presented under the guise of a graceful dreamy symbolism, a little though not much sicklied over with learning. In the second the satiric tendency of the *Fabliaux* and *Renart* is carried still further, with an admixture of not often apposite learning to a much greater extent. Narcissus was superfluous where William of Lorris introduced him, but Pygmalion and his image, inserted at great length by Jean de Meung, when after twenty thousand lines the catastrophe is at length approaching, are felt to be far greater intruders.

Contrast of the parts.

The completeness of the representation of the time given by the poem is of course enormously increased by this second part, and the individual touches, though rather lost in the wilderness of "skipping octosyllables," are wonderfully sharp and true at times. Yet to some judgments at any rate the charm of the piece will seem mostly to have vanished when Bialacoil is once shut up in his tower. In mere poetry Jean de Meung is almost infinitely the inferior of William of Lorris: and though the latter may receive but contemptuous treatment from persons who demand "messages," "meanings," and so forth, others will find message and meaning enough in his allegorical presentation of the perennial quest, of "the way of a man with a maid," and more than enough beauty in the pictures

Value of both, and charm of the first.

with which he has adorned it. He is indeed the first great word-painter of the Middle Ages, and for long —almost to the close of them—most poets simply copied him, while even the greatest used him as a starting-point and source of hints.[1] Also besides pictures he has music—music not very brilliant or varied, but admirably matching his painting, soft, dreamy, not so much monotonous as uniform with a soothing uniformity. Few poets deserve better than William of Lorris the famous hyperbole which Greek furnished in turn to Latin and to English. He is indeed "softer than sleep," and, as soft sleep is, laden with gracious and various visions.

Marie de France and Rutebœuf.

The great riches of French literature at this time, and the necessity of arranging this history rather with a view to "epoch-making" kinds and books than to interesting individual authors, make attention to many of these latter impossible here. Thus Marie de France[2] yields to few authors of our two centuries in charm and interest for the reader; yet for us she must be regarded chiefly as one of the practitioners of the fable, and as the chief practitioner of the *Lai*, which in her hands is merely a subdivision of the general romance on a smaller scale. So, again, the *trouvère* Rutebœuf, who has been the subject of critical attention, a little disproportionate perhaps,

[1] The following of the Rose would take a volume, even treated as the poem itself is here. The English version has been referred to: Italian naturalised it early in a sonnet cycle, *Il Fiore*. Every country welcomed it, but the actual versions are as nothing to the imitations and the influence.

[2] See note above, p. 286.

considering the vast amount of work as good as his which has hardly any critical notice, but still not undeserved, must serve us rather as an introducer of the subject of dramatic poetry than as an individual, though his work is in the bulk of it non-dramatic, and though almost all of it is full of interest in itself.

Rutebœuf[1] (a name which seems to be a professional *nom de guerre* rather than a patronymic) was married in 1260, and has devoted one of his characteristic poems, half "complaints," half satires, to this not very auspicious event. For the rest, it is rather conjectured than known that his life must have filled the greater part, if not the whole, of the last two-thirds of the thirteenth century, thus including the dates of both parts of the *Rose* within it. The tendencies of the second part of the great poem appear in Rutebœuf more distinctly than those of the earlier, though, like both, his work shows the firm grip which allegory was exercising on all poetry, and indeed on all literature. He has been already referred to as having written an outlying "branch" of *Renart;* and not a few of his other poems—*Le Dit des Cordeliers*, *Frère Denise*, and others—are of the class of the *Fabliaux:* indeed Rutebœuf may be taken as the type and chief figure to us of the whole body of *fabliau*-writing *trouvères*. Besides the marriage poem, we have others on his personal affairs, the chief of which is speakingly entitled "La Pauvreté Rutebœuf." But he has been even more, and even more justly, prized as having left

[1] Ed. Jubinal, 2d ed., Paris, 1874; or ed. Kressner, Wolfenbüttel, 1885.

us no small number of historical or political poems, not a few of which are occupied with the decay of the crusading spirit. The "Complainte d'Outremer," the "Complainte de Constantinoble," the "Débat du Croisé et du Décroisé" tell their own tale, and contain generous, if perhaps not very long-sighted or practical, laments and indignation over the decadence of adventurous piety. Others are less religious; but, on the whole, Rutebœuf, even in his wilder days, seems to have been (except for that dislike of the friars, in which he was not alone) a religiously minded person, and we have a large body of poems, assigned to his later years, which are distinctly devotional. These deal with his repentance, with his approaching death, with divers Lives of Saints, &c. But the most noteworthy of them, as a fresh strand in the rope we are here weaving, is the Miracle-play of *Théophile*. It will serve as a text or starting-point on which to take up the subject of the drama itself, with no more about Rutebœuf except the observation that the varied character of his work is no doubt typical of that of at least the later *trouvères* generally. They were practically men of letters, not to say journalists, of all work that was likely to pay; and must have shifted from romance to drama, from satire to lyric, just as their audience or their patrons might happen to demand, as their circumstances or their needs might happen to dictate.

Drama.

The obscure but not uninteresting subject of the links between the latest stages of classical drama and the earliest stages of mediæval belongs to the first volume of this series; indeed by

the eleventh century (or before the period, properly speaking, of this book opens) the vernacular drama, as far as the sacred side of it is concerned, was certainly established in France, although not in any other country. But it is not quite certain whether we actually possess anything earlier than the twelfth century, even in French, and it is exceedingly doubtful whether what we have in any other vernacular is older than the fourteenth. The three oldest mystery plays wherein any modern language makes its appearance are those of *The Ten Virgins*,[1] mainly in Latin, but partly in a dialect which is neither quite French nor quite Provençal; the Mystery of *Daniel*, partly Latin and partly French; and the Mystery of *Adam*,[2] which is all French. The two latter, when first discovered, were as usual put too early by their discoverers; but it is certain that they are not younger than the twelfth century, while it is all but certain that the *Ten Virgins* dates from the eleventh, if not even the tenth. In the thirteenth we find, besides Rutebœuf's *Théophile*, a *Saint Nicolas* by another very well-known *trouvère*, Jean Bodel of Arras, author of many late and probably rehandled *chansons*, and of the famous classification of romance which has been adopted above.

It was probably on the well-known principle of "not letting the devil have all the best tunes" that the Church, which had in the patristic ages so vio-

[1] Ed. Monmerqué et Michel, *Théâtre Français au Moyen Age*. Paris, 1874. This also contains *Théophile*, *Saint Nicolas*, and the plays of Adam de la Halle.

[2] Ed. Luzarches, Tours, 1854; ed. Palustre, Paris, 1877.

lently denounced the stage, and which has never wholly relaxed her condemnation of its secular use, attempted at once to gratify and sanctify the taste for dramatic performances by adopting the form, and if possible confining it to pious uses. But there is a school of literary historians who hold that there was no direct adoption of a form intentionally dramatic, and that the modern sacred drama—the only drama for centuries—was simply an expansion of or excrescence from the services of the Church herself, which in their antiphonal character, and in the alternation of monologue and chorus, were distinctly dramatic in form. This, however, is one of those numerous questions which are only good to be argued, and can never reach a conclusion; nor need it greatly trouble those who believe that all literary forms are more or less natural to man, and that man's nature will therefore, example or no example, find them out and practise them, in measure and degree according to circumstances, sooner or later.

At any rate, if there was any hope in the mind of any ecclesiastical person at any time of confining dramatic performances to sacred subjects, that hope was doomed to disappointment, and in France at least to very speedy disappointment. The examples of Mystery or Miracle plays which we have of a date older than the beginning of the fourteenth century are not numerous, but it is quite clear that at an early time the necessity for interspersing comic interludes was recognised; and it is needless to say to any one who has ever looked even slightly at the subject that these interludes soon

became a regular part of the performance, and exhibited what to modern ideas seems a very indecorous disregard of the respect due to the company in which they found themselves. The great Bible mysteries, no less and no more than the miracle plays of the Virgin[1] and the Saints, show this characteristic throughout, and the Fool's remark which pleased Lamb, "Hazy weather, Master Noah!" was a strictly legitimate and very much softened descendant of the kind of pleasantries which diversify the sacred drama of the Middle Ages in all but its very earliest examples.

It was certain, at any rate in France, that from comic interludes in sacred plays to sheer profane comedy in ordinary life the step would not be far nor the interval of time long. The *fabliaux* more particularly were farces already in the state of *scenario*, and some of them actually contained dialogue. To break them up and shape them into actual plays required much less than the innate love for drama which characterises the French people, and the keen literary sense and craft which characterised the French *trouvères* of the thirteenth century.

Adam de la Halle.

The honour of producing the first examples known to us is assigned to Adam de la Halle, a *trouvère* of Arras, who must have been a pretty exact contemporary of Rutebœuf, and who be-

[1] Several of these miracles of the Virgin will be found in the volume by Monmerqué and Michel referred to above: the whole collection has been printed by the Société des Anciens Textes. The MS. is of the fourteenth century, but some of its contents may date from the thirteenth.

sides some lyrical work has left us two plays, *Li Jus de la Feuillie* and *Robin et Marion*.[1] The latter, as its title almost sufficiently indicates, is a dramatised *pastourelle;* the former is less easy to classify, but it stands in something like the same relation to the personal poems, of which, as has just been mentioned in the case of Rutebœuf himself, the *trouvères* were so fond. For it introduces himself, his wife (at least she is referred to), his father, and divers of his Arras friends. And though rough in construction, it is by no means a very far-off ancestor of the comedy of manners in its most developed form.

Robin et Marion.

It may be more interesting to give some account here of these two productions, the parents of so numerous and famous a family, than to dwell on the early miracle plays, which reached their fullest development in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and then for the most part died away. The play (*Jeu* is the general term, and the exact, though now in French obsolete, equivalent of the English word) of *Robin et Marion* combines the general theme of the earlier lyric *pastourelle*, as explained above, with the more general pastoral theme of the love of shepherd and shepherdess. The scene opens on Marion singing to the burden "Robins m'a demandée, si m'ara." To her the Knight, who inquires the meaning of her song, whereupon she avows her love for Robin. Nevertheless he woos her, in a fashion rather clumsy than cavalier, but receives

[1] Besides the issue above noted these have been separately edited by A. Rambeau. Marburg, 1886.

no encouragement. Robin comes up after the Knight's departure. He is, to use Steerforth's words in *David Copperfield*, "rather a chuckle-headed fellow for the girl," but is apparently welcome. They eat rustic fare together and then dance; but more company is desired, and Robin goes to fetch it. He tells the friends he asks that some one has been courting Marion, and they prudently resolve to bring, one his great pitch-fork and another his good blackthorn. Meanwhile the Knight returns, and though Marion replies to his accost—

> "Pour Dieu, sire, alez vo chemin,
> Si ferès moult grant courtoisie,"

he renews his suit, but is again rejected. Returning in a bad temper he meets Robin and cuffs him soundly, a correction which Robin does not take in the heroic manner. Marion runs to rescue him, and the Knight threatens to carry her off—which Robin, even though his friends have come up, is too cowardly to prevent. She, however, is constant and escapes; the piece finishing by a long and rather tedious festival of the clowns. Its drawbacks are obvious, and are those natural to an experiment which has no patterns before it; but the figure of Marion is exceedingly graceful and pleasing, and the whole has promise. It is essentially a comic opera; but that a *trouvère* of the thirteenth century should by himself, so far as we can see, have founded comic opera is not a small thing.

The *Jus de la Feuillie* ("the booths"), otherwise *Li Jus Adam*, or Adam's play, is more ambitious and more complicated, but also more chaotic. It is, as has been

said, an early sketch of a comedy of manners; but upon this is grafted in the most curious way a fairy interlude, or rather after-piece. Adam himself opens the piece and informs his friends with much coolness that he has tried married life, but intends to go back to "clergy" and then set out for Paris, leaving his father to take care of his wife. He even replies to the neighbours' remonstrances by enlarging in the most glowing terms on the passion he has felt for his wife and on her beauty, adding, with a crude brutality which has hardly a ghost of atoning fun in it, that this is all over—

The Jeu de la Feuillie.

"Car mes fains en est apaiés."

His father then appears, and Adam shows himself not more dutiful as a son than he is grateful as a husband. But old Henri de la Halle, an easy-going father, has not much reproach for him. The piece, however, has hardly begun before it goes off into a medley of unconnected scenes, though each has a sort of *fabliau* interest of its own. A doctor is consulted by his clients; a monk demands alms and offerings in the name of Monseigneur Saint Acaire, promising miracles; a madman succeeds him; and in the midst enters the *Mainie Hellequin*, "troop of Hellequin" (a sort of Oberon or fairy king), with Morgue la fée among them. The fairies end with a song, and the miscellaneous conversation of the men of Arras resumes and continues for some time, reaching, in fact, no formal termination.

In this odd piece, which, except the description of

Comparison of them.

Marie the deserted wife, has little poetical merit, we see drama of the particular kind in a much ruder and vaguer condition than in the parallel instance of *Robin et Marion*. There the very form of the *pastourelle* was in a manner dramatic—it wanted little adjustment to be quite so; and though the *coda* of the rustic merry-making is rather artless, it is conceivably admissible. Here we are not far out of Chaos as far as dramatic arrangement goes. Adam's announced desertion of his wife and intended journey to Paris lead to nothing: the episodes or scenes of the doctor and the monk are connected with nothing; the fool or madman and his father are equally independent; and the "meyney of Hellequin" simply play within the play, not without rhyme, but certainly with very little reason. Nevertheless the piece is almost more interesting than the comparatively regular farces (into which rather later the *fabliaux* necessarily developed themselves) and than the miracle plays (which were in the same way dramatic versions of the Lives of the Saints), precisely because of this irregular and pillar-to-post character. We see that the author is trying a new kind, that he is endeavouring to create for himself. He is not copying anything in form; he is borrowing very little from any one in material. He has endeavoured to represent, and has not entirely failed in representing, the comings and goings, the ways and says, of his townsmen at fair and market. The curiously desultory character of this early drama—the character hit off most happily in modern times by *Wallenstein's Lager*—naturally appears here in an exaggerated form. But the root

of the matter—the construction of drama, not on the model of Terence or of anybody, but on the model of life—is here.

It will be for my successor to show the wide extension of this dramatic form in the succeeding period. Here it takes rank rather as having the interest of origins, and as helping to fill out the picture of the marvellously various ability of Frenchmen of letters in the thirteenth century, than for the positive bulk or importance of its constituents. And it is important to repeat that it connects itself in the general literary survey both with *fabliau* and with allegory. The personifying taste, which bred or was bred from allegory, is very close akin to the dramatic taste, and the *fabliau*, as has been said more than once, is a farce in the making, and sometimes far advanced towards being completely made.

Early French prose.

All the matter hitherto discussed in this chapter, as well as all that of previous chapters as far as French is concerned, with the probable if not certain exception of the Arthurian romances, has been in verse. Indeed—still with this exception, and with the further and more certain exceptions of a few laws, a few sermons, &c.—there was no French prose, or none that has come down to us, until the thirteenth century. The Romance tongues, as contradistinguished from Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic, were slow to develop vernacular prose; the reason, perhaps, being that Latin, of one kind or another, was still so familiar to all persons of any education that, for purposes of instruction and use,

vernacular prose was not required, while verse was more agreeable to the vulgar.

Laws and sermons.

Yet it was inevitable that prose should, sooner or later, make its appearance; and it was equally inevitable that spoken prose sermons should be of the utmost antiquity. Indeed such sermons form, by reasonable inference, the subject of the very earliest reference[1] to that practically lost *lingua romana rustica* which formed the bridge between Latin and the Romance tongues. But they do not seem to have been written down, and were no doubt extempore addresses rather than regular discourses. Law appears to have had the start of divinity in the way of providing formal written prose; and the law-fever of the Northmen, which had already shaped, or was soon to shape, the "Gray-goose" code of their northernmost home in Iceland, expressed itself early in Normandy and England — hardly less early in the famous *Lettres du Sépulcre* or *Assises de Jérusalem*, the code of the Crusading kingdom, which was drawn up almost immediately after its establishment, and which exists, though not in the very oldest form. Much uncertainty prevails on the question when the first sermons in French vernacular were formally composed, and by whom. It has been maintained, and denied, that the French sermons of St Bernard which exist are original, in which case the practice must have come in pretty early

[1] The often-quoted statement that in 659 Mummolinus or Momolenus was made Bishop of Noyon because of his double skill in "Teutonic" and "Roman" (*not* "Latin") speech.

in the twelfth century. There is, at any rate, no doubt that Maurice de Sully, who was Archbishop of Paris for more than thirty years, from 1160 onwards, composed sermons in French; or at least that sermons of his, which may have been written in Latin, were translated into French. For this whole point of early prose, especially on theological subjects, is complicated by the uncertainty whether the French forms are original or not. There is no doubt that the feeling expressed by Ascham in England nearly four centuries later, that it would have been for himself much easier and pleasanter to write in Latin, must at the earlier date have prevailed far more extensively.

Still prose made its way: it must have received an immense accession of vogue if the prose Arthurian romances really date from the end of the twelfth century; and by the beginning of the thirteenth it found a fresh channel in which to flow, the channel of historical narrative. The earliest French chronicles of the ordinary compiling kind date from this time; and (which is of infinitely greater importance) it is from this time (*cir.* 1210) that the first great French prose book, from the literary point, appears —that is to say, the *Conquête de Constantinople*,[1] or history of the Fourth Crusade, by Geoffroy de Villehardouin, Marshal of Champagne and Romanie, who was born about 1160 in the first-named province, and died at Messinople in Greece about 1213.

Villehardouin.

This deservedly famous and thoroughly delightful

[1] Ed. Natalis de Wailly. Paris, 1872.

book, which has more than one contemporary or slightly younger parallel, though none of these approaches it in literary interest, presents the most striking resemblance to a *chanson de geste*—in conduct, arrangement (the paragraphs representing *laisses*), and phraseology. But it is not, as some other early prose is, merely verse without rhyme, and with broken rhythm; and it is impossible to read it without astonished admiration at the excellence of the medium which the writer, apparently by instinct, has attained. The list of the crusaders; their embassy to "li dux de Venise qui ot à nom Henris Dandolo et etait mult sages et mult prouz"; their bargain, in which the business-like Venetian, after stipulating for 85,000 marks of transport-money, agrees to add fifty armed galleys without hire, for the love of God *and* on the terms of half-conquests; the death of the Count of Champagne (much wept by Geoffroy his marshal); and the substitution after difficulties of Boniface, Marquis of Montserrat;—these things form the prologue. When the army is actually got together the transport-money is unfortunately lacking, and the Venetians, still with the main chance steadily before them, propose that the crusaders shall recover for them, from the King of Hungary, Zara, "Jadres en Esclavonie, qui est une des plus forz citez du monde." Then we are told how Dandolo and his host take the cross; how Alexius Comnenus, the younger son of Isaac, arrives and begs aid; how the fleet set out ("Ha! Dex, tant bon destrier i ot mis!"); how Zara is besieged and

taken; of the pact made with Alexius to divert the host to Constantinople; of the voyage thither after the Pope's absolution for the slightly piratical and not in the least crusading *prise de Jadres* has been obtained; of the dissensions and desertions at Corfu, and the arrival at the "Bras St Georges," the Sea of Marmora. This is what may be called the second part.

The third part opens with debates at San Stefano as to the conduct of the attack. The emperor sends soft words to "la meillor gens qui soent sanz corone" (this is the description of the chiefs), but they reject them, arrange themselves in seven battles, storm the port, take the castle of Galata, and then assault the city itself. The fighting having gone wholly against him, the emperor retires by the open side of the city, and the Latins triumph. Some show is made of resuming, or rather beginning, a real crusade; but the young Emperor Alexius, to whom his blind father Isaac has handed over the throne, bids them stay, and they do so. Soon dissensions arise, war breaks out, a conspiracy is formed against Isaac and his son by Mourzufle, "et Murchufles chauça les houses vermoilles," quickly putting the former owners of the scarlet boots to death. A second siege and capture of the city follows, and Baldwin of Flanders is crowned emperor, while Boniface marries the widow of Isaac, and receives the kingdom of Salonica.

It has seemed worth while to give this abstract of the book up to a certain point (there is a good deal more of confused fighting in "Romanie" before, at the

death of Boniface, Villehardouin gives up the pen to Henri of Valenciennes), because even such a bare argument may show the masterly fashion in which this first of modern vernacular historians of the great literary line handles his subject. The parts are planned with judgment and adjusted with skill; the length allotted to each incident is just enough; the speeches, though not omitted, are not inserted at the tyrannous length in which later mediæval and even Renaissance historians indulged from corrupt following of the ancients. But no abstract could show—though the few scraps of actual phrase purposely inserted may convey glimpses of it—the vigour and picturesqueness of the recital. That Villehardouin was an eyewitness explains a little, but very little: we have, unfortunately, libraries full of eyewitness-histories which are duller than any ditch-water. Nor, though he is by no means shy of mentioning his own performances, does he communicate to the story that slightly egotistic interest of gossip and personal detail of which his next great successor is perhaps the first example. It is because, while writing a rather rugged but completely genuine and unmetrical though rhythmical prose, Villehardouin has the poet's eye and grasp that he sees, and therefore makes us see, the events that he relates. These events do not form exactly the most creditable chapter of modern history; for they simply come to this, that an army assembling for a crusade against the infidel, allows itself to be bribed or wheedled into two successive attacks on two Christian princes who have given it not the slightest pro-

vocation, never attacks the infidel at all, and ends by a filibustering seizure of already Christian territory. Nor does Villehardouin make any elaborate disguise of this; but he tells the tale with such a gust, such a *furia*, that we are really as much interested in the success of this private piracy as if it had been the true crusade of Godfrey of Bouillon himself.

William of Tyre.

The earlier and more legitimate crusades did not lack fitting chroniclers in the same style, though none of them had the genius of Villehardouin. The *Roman d'Eracles* (as the early vernacular version[1] of the Latin chronicle of William of Tyre used to be called, for no better reason than that the first line runs, "Les anciennes histoires dient qu'Eracles [Heraclius] qui fu mout bons crestiens gouverna l'empire de Rome") is a chronicle the earlier part of which is assigned to a certain Bernard, treasurer of the Abbey of Corbie. It is a very extensive relation, carrying the history of Latin Palestine from Peter the Hermit's pilgrimage to about the year 1190, composed probably within ten or fifteen years after this later date, and written, though not with Villehardouin's epic spirit, in a very agreeable and readable fashion. Not much later, vernacular chronicles of profane history in France became common, and the celebrated *Grandes Chroniques* of St Denis began to be composed in French. But the only production of this thirteenth century which has taken rank in general literary knowledge with the work of

[1] Ed. Paulin Paris. Paris, 1879.

the Marshal of Champagne is that[1] of Jean de Joinville, also a Champenois and Seneschal of the province, who was born about ten years after Villehardouin's death, and who died, after a life prolonged to not many short of a hundred years, in 1319. Joinville's historical work seems to have been the occupation of his old age; but its subject, the Life and Crusading misfortunes of Saint Louis, belongs to the experiences of his youth and early middle life. Besides the *Histoire de Saint Louis*, we have from him a long *Credo* or profession of religious faith.

Joinville.

There is no reason at all to question the sincerity of this faith. But Joinville was a shrewd and practical man, and when the kings of France and Navarre pressed him to take the cross a second time, he answered that their majesties' servants had during his first absence done him and his people so much harm that he thought he had better not go away again. Indeed it would be displeasing to God, "qui mit son corps pour son peuple sauver," if he, Joinville, abandoned *his* people. And he reports only in the briefest abstract the luckless "voie de Tunes," or expedition to Tunis. But of the earlier and not much less unlucky Damietta crusade, in which he took part, as well as of his hero's life till all but the last, he has written very fully, and in a fashion which is very interesting, though unluckily we have no manuscript representing the original text, or even near to it in point of time. The book, which has been thought to have been written in pieces at long intervals, has

[1] Ed. Natalis de Wailly. Paris, 1874.

nothing of the antique vigour of Villehardouin. Joinville is something of a gossip, and though he evidently writes with a definite literary purpose, is not master of very great argumentative powers. But for this same reason he abounds in anecdote, and in the personal detail which, though it may easily be overdone, is undoubtedly now and then precious for the purpose of enabling us to conjure up the things and men of old time more fully and correctly. And there is a Pepysian garrulity as well as a Pepysian shrewdness about Joinville; so that, on the whole, he fills the position of ancestor in the second group of historians, the group of lively *raconteurs*, as well as Villehardouin leads that of inspired describers. For an instance of the third kind, the philosophical historian, France, if not Europe, had to wait two centuries, when such a one came in Comines.

It is almost unnecessary to say that when the secret of producing prose and its advantages over verse for certain purposes had been discovered, it was freely employed for all such purposes, scientific as science was understood, devotional, instructive, business (the *Livre des Mestiers*, or book of the guilds of Paris, is of the thirteenth century), and miscellaneous. But few of these things concern literature proper. It is otherwise with the application of prose to fiction.

Fiction.

This, as we have seen, had probably taken place in the case of the Arthurian romances as early as the middle of our period, and throughout the thirteenth century prose romances of length were not unknown, though it was later that all the

three classes—Carlovingian, Arthurian, and Antique—were thrown indiscriminately into prose, and lengthened even beyond the huge length of their later representatives in verse. But for this reason or that, romance in prose was with rare exceptions unfavourable to the production of the best literature. It encouraged the prolixity which was the great curse of the Middle Ages, and the deficient sense of form and scanty presence of models prevented the observance of anything like a proper scheme.

But among the numerous origins of this wonderful time the origin of the short prose tale, in which France was to hold almost if not quite the highest rank among European countries, was also included. It would not seem that the kind was as yet very frequently attempted—the fact that the verse *fabliau* was still in the very height of its flourishing-time, made this unlikely; nor was it till that flourishing-time was over that farces on the one hand, and prose tales on the other, succeeded as fruit the *fabliau*-flower. But it is from the thirteenth century that (with some others) we have *Aucassin et Nicolette*.[1] If it was for a short time rather too much of a fashion to praise (it cannot be over-praised) this exquisite story, no wise man will allow himself to be disgusted any more than he will allow himself to be

Aucassin et Nicolette.

[1] Frequently edited: not least satisfactorily in the *Nouvelles Françaises du XIIIme Siècle*, referred to above. In 1887 two English translations, by Mr Lang and Mr Bourdillon, the latter with the text and much apparatus, appeared: and Mr Bourdillon has recently edited a facsimile of the unique MS. (Oxford, 1896).

attracted by fashion. This work of "the old caitiff," as the author calls himself with a rather Hibernian coaxingness, is what has been called a *cantefable*—that is to say, it is not only obviously written, like verse romances and *fabliaux*, for recitation, but it consists partly of prose, partly of verse, the music for the latter being also given. Mr Swinburne, Mr Pater, and, most of all, Mr Lang, have made it unnecessary to tell in any detailed form the story how Aucassin, the son of Count Garin of Beaucaire, fell in love with Nicolette, a Saracen captive, who has been bought by the Viscount of the place and brought up as his daughter; how Nicolette was shut up in a tower to keep her from Aucassin; how Count Bongars of Valence assailed Beaucaire and was captured by Aucassin on the faith of a promise from his father that Nicolette shall be restored to him; how the Count broke his word, and Aucassin, setting his prisoner free, was put in prison himself; how Nicolette escaped, and by her device Aucassin also; how the lovers were united; and how, after a comic interlude in the country of "Torelore," which could be spared by all but folk-lorists, the damsel is discovered to be daughter of the King of Carthage, and all ends in bowers of bliss.

But even the enthusiasm and the art of three of the best writers of English and lovers of literature in this half-century have not exhausted the wonderful charm of this little piece. The famous description of Nicolette, as she escapes from her prison and walks through the daisies that look black against her white feet, is certainly the most beautiful thing of the kind in mediæval

prose-work, and the equal of anything of the kind anywhere. And for original audacity few things surpass Aucassin's equally famous inquiry, "En Paradis qu'ai-je à faire?" with the words with which he follows it up to the Viscount. But these show passages only concentrate the charm which is spread all over the novelette, at least until its real conclusion, the union and escape of the lovers. Here, as in the earlier part of the *Rose*—to which it is closely akin—is the full dreamy beauty, a little faint, a little shadowy, but all the more attractive, of mediæval art; and here it has managed to convey itself in prose no less happily and with more concentrated happiness than there in verse.

CHAPTER VIII.

ICELANDIC AND PROVENÇAL.

RESEMBLANCES — CONTRASTS — ICELANDIC LITERATURE OF THIS TIME MAINLY PROSE—DIFFICULTIES WITH IT—THE SAGA—ITS INSULARITY OF MANNER—OF SCENERY AND CHARACTER—FACT AND FICTION IN THE SAGAS — CLASSES AND AUTHORSHIP OF THEM — THE FIVE GREATER SAGAS—'NJALA'—'LAXDÆLA'—'EYRBYGGJA'—'EGLA'—'GRETTLA'—ITS CRITICS—MERITS OF IT—THE PARTING OF ASDIS AND HER SONS — GREAT PASSAGES OF THE SAGAS — STYLE — PROVENÇAL MAINLY LYRIC — ORIGIN OF THIS LYRIC — FORMS — MANY MEN, ONE MIND—EXAMPLE OF RHYME-SCHEMES—PROVENÇAL POETRY NOT GREAT — BUT EXTRAORDINARILY PEDAGOGIC — THOUGH NOT DIRECTLY ON ENGLISH — SOME TROUBADOURS — CRITICISM OF PROVENÇAL.

THERE may seem at first to be no sufficient reason for treating together two such literatures as those named in the title of this chapter. But the connection, both of likeness and unlikeness, between them is too tempting to the student of comparative literature, and too useful in such a comparative survey of literature as that which we are here undertaking, to be mistaken or refused. Both attaining, thanks to very different causes, an extraordinarily early maturity, completely worked themselves out in an

Resemblances.

extraordinarily short time. Neither had, so far as we know, the least assistance from antecedent vernacular models. Each achieved an extraordinary perfection and intensity, Icelandic in spirit, Provençal in form.

And their differences are no less fascinating, since they start from this very diversity of similar perfection.

Contrasts.

Icelandic, after a brief period of copying French and other languages, practically died out as a language producing literature; and, perhaps for that very reason, maintained itself in all the more continuity as a spoken language. Even its daughter —or at least successor—Norse tongues produced nothing worthy to take up the tradition of the Sagas and the Poems. It influenced (till the late and purely literary revival of it biassed to some extent the beginnings of the later Romantic revival in Western Europe, a hundred and fifty years ago) nothing and nobody. It was as isolated as its own island. To Provençal, on the other hand, though its own actual producing-time was about as brief, belongs the schooling, to no small extent, of the whole literature of Europe. Directly, it taught the *trouvères* of Northern France and the poets of Spain and Italy prosody, and a certain amount of poetical style and tone; indirectly, or directly through France, it influenced England and Germany. It started, indeed, none of the greater poetical kinds except lyric, and lyric is the true *grass* of Parnassus — it springs up naturally everywhere; but it started the form of all, or at least was the first to adapt from Latin a prosody suitable to all.

The most obvious, though not the least interesting,

points of likeness in unlikeness have been left to the last. The contrasts between the hawthorn and nightingale of Provence, her "winds heavy with the rose," and the grey firths, the ice- and foam-fretted skerries of Iceland; between the remains of Roman luxury pushed to more than Roman effeminacy in the one, and the rough Germanic virtue exasperated to sheer ferocity in the other,—are almost too glaring for anything but a schoolboy's or a rhetorician's essay. Yet they are reproduced with an incredible—a "copy-book"—fidelity in the literatures. The insistence of experts and enthusiasts on the law-abiding character of the sagas has naturally met with some surprise from readers of these endless private wars, and burnings, and "heath-slayings," these feuds where blood flows like water, to be compensated by fines as regular as a water-rate, these methodical assassinations, in which it is not in the least discreditable to heroes to mob heroes as brave as themselves to death by numbers, in which nobody dreams of measuring swords, or avoiding vantage of any kind. Yet the enthusiastic experts are not wrong. Whatever outrages the Icelander may commit, he always has the law — an eccentric, unmodern, conventional law, but a real and recognised one—before his eyes, and respects it in principle, however much he may sometimes violate it in practice. To the Provençal, on the other hand, law, as such, is a nuisance. He will violate it, so to speak, on principle—less because the particular violation has a particular temptation for him than because the thing is forbidden. The Icelander may covet and take an-

other man's wife, but it is to make her his own. The Provençal will hardly fall, and will never stay, in love with any one who is not another's. In savagery there is not so very much to choose: it requires a calculus, not of morals but of manners, to distinguish accurately between carving the blood-eagle on your enemy and serving up your rival's heart as a dish to his mistress. In passion also there may be less difference than the extreme advocates of both sides would maintain. But in all things external the contrast, the hackneyed contrast, of South and North never could have been exhibited with a more artistic completeness, never has been exhibited with a completeness so artistic. And these two contrasting parts were played at the very same time at the two ends of Europe. In the very same years when the domestic histories and tragedies (there were few comedies) of Iceland were being spun into the five great sagas and the fifty smaller ones, the fainter, the more formal, but the not less peculiar music of the gracious long-drawn Provençal love-song was sounding under the vines and olives of Languedoc. The very Icelanders who sailed to Constantinople in the intervals of making the subjects of these sagas, and sometimes of composing them, must not seldom have passed or landed on the coasts where *cansos* and *tensos*, *lai* and *sirvente*, were being woven, and have listened to them as the Ulyssean mariners listened to the songs of the sirens.

It is not, of course, true that Provençal only sings of love and Icelandic only of war. There is a fair

amount of love in the Northern literature and a fair amount of fighting in the Southern. And it is not true that Icelandic literature is wholly prose, Provençal wholly poetry. But it is true that Provençal prose plays an extremely small part in Provençal literature, and that Icelandic poetry plays, in larger minority, yet still a minor part in Icelandic. It so happens, too, that in this volume we are almost wholly concerned with Icelandic prose, and that we shall not find it necessary to say much, if anything, about Provençal that is not in verse. It is distinctly curious how much later, *cæteris paribus*, the Romance tongues are than the Teutonic in attaining facilities of prose expression. But there is no reason for believing that even the Teutonic tongues falsified the general law that poetry comes before prose. And certainly this was the case with Icelandic—so much so that, uncertain as are the actual dates, it seems better to relinquish the Iceland of poetry to the first volume of this series, where it can be handled in connection with that Anglo-Saxon verse which it so much resembles. The more characteristic Eddaic poems—that is to say, the most characteristic parts of Icelandic poetry—must date from Heathen times, or from the first conflicts of Christianity with Heathenism in Iceland; and this leaves them far behind us.[1] On the other hand, the work which we have in Provençal before the extreme end of the eleventh century is not finished literature. It has linguistic interest, the interest of origins, but no more.

Icelandic literature of this time mainly prose.

[1] Iceland began to be Christian in 1000.

Although there is practically as little doubt about the antiquity of Icelandic literature[1] as about its interest, there is unusual room for guesswork as to the exact dates of the documents which compose it. Writing seems to have been introduced into Iceland late; and it is not the opinion of scholars who combine learning with patriotism that many, if any, of the actual MSS. date further back than the thirteenth century; while the actual composition of the oldest that we have is not put earlier than the twelfth, and rather its later than its earlier part. Moreover, though Icelanders were during this period, and indeed from the very first settlement of the island, constantly in foreign countries and at foreign courts — though as Vikings or Varangians, as merchants or merely travelling adventurers, they were to be found all over Europe, from Dublin to Constantinople — yet, on the other hand, few or no foreigners visited Iceland, and it figures hardly at all in the literary and historical records of the Continent or even of the British Isles, with which

Difficulties with it.

[1] It is almost superfluous to insert, but would be disagreeable to omit, a reference to the *Sturlunga Saga* (2 vols., Oxford, 1879) and the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* (2 vols., Oxford, 1883) of the late Dr Vigfusson and Professor York Powell. The first contains an invaluable sketch, or rather history, of Icelandic literature: the second (though one may think its arrangement a little arbitrary) is a book of unique value and interest. Had these two been followed up according to Dr Vigfusson's plan, practically the whole of Icelandic literature that has real interest would have been accessible once for all. As it is, one is divided between satisfaction that England should have done such a service to one of the great mediæval literatures, and regret that she has not done as much for others.

it naturally had most correspondence. We are therefore almost entirely devoid of those side-lights which are so invaluable in general literary history, while yet again we have no borrowings from Icelandic literature by any other to tell us the date of the borrowed matter. At the end of our present time, and still more a little later, Charlemagne and Arthur and the romances of antiquity make their appearance in Icelandic; but nothing Icelandic makes its appearance elsewhere. For it is not to be supposed for one moment that the *Nibelungenlied*, for instance, is the work of men who wrote with the *Volsunga-Saga* or the Gudrun lays before them, any more than the *Grettis Saga* is made up out of *Beowulf*. These things are mere examples of the successive refashionings of traditions and stories common to the race in different centuries, manners, and tongues. Except as to the bare fact of community of origin they help us little or not at all.

The Saga.

The reasons why Icelandic literature, in its most peculiar and interesting form of the saga, did not penetrate abroad are clear enough; and the remoteness and want of school-education in the island itself are by no means the most powerful of them. The very thing which is most characteristic of them, and which in these later times constitutes their greatest charm, must have been against them in their own time. For the stories which ran like an epidemic through Europe in the years immediately before and immediately after 1200, though they might be in some cases concerned directly with national heroes, appealed without exception to

international and generally human interests. The slightest education, or the slightest hearing of persons educated, sufficed to teach every one that Alexander and Cæsar were great conquerors, that the Story of Troy (the exact truth of which was never doubted) had been famous for hundreds and almost thousands of years. Charlemagne had had directly to do with the greater part of Europe in peace or war, and the struggle with the Saracens was of old and universal interest, freshened by the Crusades. The Arthurian story received from fiction, if not from history, an almost equally wide bearing; and was, besides, knitted to religion—the one universal interest of the time—by its connection with the Graal. All Europe, yet again, had joined in the Crusades, and the stories brought by the crusaders directly or indirectly from the East were in the same way common property.

Its insularity of manner.

But saga-literature had nothing of this appeal. It was as indifferently and almost superciliously insular as the English country-house novel itself, and may have produced in some of the very few foreigners who can ever have known it originally, something of the same feelings of wrath which we have seen excited by the English country-house novel in our own day. The heroes were not, according to the general ideas of mediæval Europe, either great chiefs or accomplished knights; the heroines were the very reverse of those damsels "with mild mood" (as the catch-word in the English romances has it) whom the general Middle Age liked or thought it liked. An intricate, intensely local,

and (away from the locality) not seldom shocking system of law and public morality pervaded the whole. The supernatural element, though in itself it might have been an attraction, was of a cast quite different from the superstitions of the South, or even of the Centre; and the Christian element, which was to the Middle Ages the very air they breathed, was either absent altogether or present in an artificial, uneasy, and scanty fashion.

Of scenery and character.

Yet all these things were of less importance than another, which is, after all, the great *differentia*, the abiding quality, of the sagas. In the literature of the rest of Europe, and especially in the central and everywhere radiating literature of France, there were sometimes local and almost parochial touches — sometimes unimportant heroes, not seldom savage heroines, frequently quaint bits of exotic supernaturalism. But all this was subdued to a kind of common literary handling, a "disrealising" process which made them universally acceptable. The personal element, too, was conspicuously absent—the generic character is always uppermost. Charlemagne was a real person, and not a few of the incidents with which he was connected in the *chansons* were real events; but he and they have become mere stuff of romance as we see them in these poems. Whether Arthur was a real person or not, the same to an even greater extent is true of him. The kings and their knights appealed to Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, Italians alike, because they were not obtrusively English, German, Italian,

or French. But the sagas are from the first and to the (at least genuine) last nothing if not national, domestic, and personal. The grim country of ice and fire, of jökul and skerry, the massive timber homesteads, the horse-fights and the Viking voyages, the spinning-wheel and the salting-tub, are with us everywhere; and yet there is an almost startling individuality, for all the sameness of massacre and chicanery, of wedding and divorce, which characterises the circumstances. Gunnar is not distinguished from Grettir merely by their adventures; there is no need of labels on the lovers of Gudrun; Steingerd in Kormak's Saga and Hallgerd in Njal's, are each something much more than types of the woman with bad blood and the woman with blood that is only light and hot. And to the unsophisticated reader and hearer, as many examples might be adduced to show, this personality, the highest excellence of literature to the sophisticated scholar, is rather a hindrance than a help. He has not proved the ways and the persons; and he likes what he has proved.

To us, on the contrary, the characteristics of saga-work, at which a glance has been made in the foregoing paragraphs, form its principal charm, a charm reinforced by the fact of its extraordinary difference from almost all other literature except (in some points) that of the Homeric poems. Although there is a good deal of common form in the sagas, though outlawry and divorce, the quibbles of the Thing and the violence of ambush or holmgang, recur to and beyond the utmost limits of permitted repetition, the

unfamiliarity of the setting atones for its monotony, and the individuality of the personages themselves very generally prevents that monotony from being even felt. The stories are never tame; and, what is more remarkable, they seldom or never have the mere extravagance which in mediæval, at least as often as in other, writing, plays Scylla to the Charybdis of tameness. Moreover, they have, as no other division of mediæval romance has in anything like the same measure, the advantage of the presence of *interesting* characters of both sexes. Only the Arthurian story can approach them here, and that leaves still an element of gracious shadowiness about the heroines, if not the heroes. The Icelandic heroine has nothing shadowy about her. Her weakest point is the want of delicacy—not in a finicking sense by any means—which a rough promiscuous life to begin with, and the extreme facility and frequency of divorce on the other, necessarily brought about. But she is always, as the French have it, a "person"—when she is good, a person altogether of the best; even when she is bad, a person seldom other than striking and often charming.

Fact and fiction in the sagas.

There is, of course, Icelandic literature in prose outside of the sagas—the great law code (*Gragas* or *Greygoose*), religious books in the usual plenty, scientific books of a kind, and others. But the saga, the story, was so emphatically the natural mould into which Icelandic literary impulse threw itself, that it is even more difficult here than elsewhere at the time to separate story and his-

tory, fiction and fact. Indeed the stricter critics would, I believe, maintain that every saga which deserves the name is actually founded on fact: the *Laxdæla* no less than the *Heimskringla*,[1] the story of Kormak no less than that of Jarl Rognwald. A merely and wholly invented story (they hold, and perhaps rightly) would have been repugnant to that extraordinarily business-like spirit which has left us, by the side of the earlier songs and later sagas, containing not a little of the most poetical matter of the whole world, the *Landnama Bok* of Ari Frodi, a Domesday-book turned into literature, which is indeed older than our time, but which forms a sort of commentary and companion to the whole of the sagas by anticipation or otherwise.

Classes and authorship of them.

Difficult as it may be to draw the line between intended history, which was always strongly "romanced" in form, if not intentionally in fact, and that very peculiar product of Icelandic genius the saga proper, in which the original domestic record has been, so to speak, "super-romanced" into a work of art, it is still possible to see it, if not to draw it, between the *Heimskringla*, the

[1] Dr Vigfusson is exceedingly severe on the *Heimskringla*, which he will have to be only a late, weak, and rationalised compilation from originals like the oddly termed "Great O. T. Saga." But it is hard for a man to think hardly of the book in which, though only a translation, he first read how Queen Sigrid the Haughty got rid of her troublesome lovers by the effectual process of burning them *en masse* in a barn, and how King Olaf died the greatest sea-death—greater even than Grenville's—of any defeated hero, in history or literature.

story of the Kings of Norway (made English after some earlier versions by Messrs Magnusson and Morris, and abstracted, as genius can abstract, by Carlyle), the *Orkneyinga* and *Færeyinga* Sagas (the tales of these outlying islands before the former came under Norwegian rule), the curious conglomerate known as the *Sturlunga Saga* on the one hand, and the greater and lesser sagas proper on the other. The former are set down to the two great writers Snorri and Sturla, the one the chief literary light of Iceland in the first half of the thirteenth century, the other the chief light in the second, both of the same family, and with Ari Frodi the three greatest of the certainly known men of letters of the island. Conjecture has naturally run riot as to the part which either Snorri or Sturla may have taken in the sagas not directly attributed to either, but most probably dating from their time, as well as with the personalities of the unknown or little known poets and prosemen who shaped the older stories at about the same period. But to the historian who takes delight in literature, and does not care very much who made it provided it is made well, what has been called "the singular silence" as to authorship which runs through the whole of the early Icelandic literature is rather a blessing than otherwise. It frees him from those biographical inquiries which always run the risk of drawing nigh to gossip, and it enables him to concentrate attention on the literature itself.

This literature is undoubtedly best exemplified, as we should expect, in the wholly anonymous and

only indirectly historical sagas of the second division, though it is fair to say that there is nothing here much finer than such things as the famous last fight of King Olaf in the *Heimskringla*, or as many other incidents and episodes in the history-books. Only the hands of the writers were freer in the others: and complete freedom—at least from all but the laws of art—is never a more "nobil thing" than it is to the literary artist.

The five greater sagas.

There seems no reason to quarrel with the classification which divides the sagas proper into two classes, greater and lesser, and assigns position in the first to five only—the Saga of Burnt Njal, that of the dwellers in Laxdale, the *Eyrbyggja*, Egil's Saga, and the Saga of Grettir the Strong. It is very unlucky that the reception extended by the English public to the publications of Mr Vigfusson and Professor York Powell, mentioned in a note above, did not encourage the editors to proceed to an edition at least of these five sagas together, which might, according to estimate, have been done in three volumes, two more containing all the small ones. Meanwhile *Njala*—the great sagas are all known by familiar diminutives of this kind—is accessible in English in the late Sir G. W. Dasent's well-known translation;[1] the *Eyrbyggja* and *Egla* in abstracts by Sir Walter Scott[2] and Mr Gosse;[3] *Laxdœla* has been treated as it deserves

[1] *The Story of Burnt Njal.* Edinburgh, 1861.

[2] Included in the Bohn edition of Mallet's *Northern Antiquities.*

[3] *Cornhill Magazine*, July 1879.

in the longest and nearly the finest section of Mr Morris's *Earthly Paradise*;[1] and the same writer with Dr Magnusson has given a literal translation of *Grettla*.[2]

The lesser sagas of the same group are some thirty in number, the best known or the most accessible being those of Gunnlaug Serpent's-Tongue, often printed in the original,[3] very short, very characteristic, and translated by the same hands as *Grettla*;[4] *Viga Glum*, translated by Sir Edmund Head;[5] *Gisli the Outlaw* (Dasent);[6] *Howard* or *Havard the Halt*, *The Banded Men*, and *Hen Thorir* (Morris and Magnusson)[7]; *Kormak*, said to be the oldest, and certainly one of the most interesting.[8]

So much of the interest of a saga depends on small points constantly varied and renewed, that only pretty full abstracts of the contents of one can give much idea of them. On the other hand, the attentive reader of a single saga can usually give a very good guess at the general nature of any other from a brief description of it, though he must of course miss the individual touches of poetry and of character. And though I speak with the humility

[1] "The Lovers of Gudrun;" *November*, part iii. p. 337, original edition. London, 1870.

[2] London, 1869.

[3] *Gunnlaug's Saga Ormstungu.* Ed. Mogk. Halle, 1886.

[4] In *Three Northern Love-Stories.* London, 1875.

[5] London, 1866.

[6] Edinburgh, 1866.

[7] In one volume. London, 1891.

[8] Not translated, and said to require re-editing in the original, but very fully abstracted in *Northern Antiquities*, as above, pp. 321-339. The verse is in the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale.*

of one who does not pretend to Icelandic scholarship, I think that translations are here less inadequate than in almost any other language, the attraction of the matter being so much greater than that of the form. For those who will not take the slight trouble to read Dasent's *Njala*, or Morris and Magnusson's *Grettla*, the next best idea attainable is perhaps from Sir Walter Scott's abstract of the *Eyrbyggja* or Mr Blackwell's of the Kormak's Saga, or Mr Gosse's of *Egla*. Njal's Saga deals with the friendship between the warrior Gunnar and the lawyer Njal, which, principally owing to the black-heartedness of Gunnar's wife Hallgerd, brings destruction on both, Njal and almost his whole family being burnt as the crowning point, but by no means the end, of an intricate series of reciprocal murders. For the blood-feuds of Iceland were as merciless as those of Corsica, with the complication—thoroughly Northern and not in the least Southern—of a most elaborate, though not entirely impartial, system of judicial inquiries and compensations, either by fine or exile. To be outlawed for murder, either in casual affray or in deliberate attack, was almost as regular a part of an Icelandic gentleman's avocations from his home and daily life as a journey on viking or trading intent, and was often combined with one or both. But outlawry and fine by no means closed the incident invariably, though they sometimes did so far as the feud was concerned: and there is hardly one saga which does not mainly or partly turn on a tangle of outrages and inquests.

As *Njala* is the most complete and dramatic of the

sagas where love has no very prominent part except in the Helen-like dangerousness, if not exactly Helen-like charm, of Hallgerd, of whom it might certainly be said that

Njala.

> "Where'er she came,
> She brought Calamity";

so *Laxdœla* is the chief of those in which love figures, though on the male side at least there is no lover that interests us as much as the hapless, reckless poet Kormak, or as Gunnlaug Serpent's-Tongue. The *Earthly Paradise* should have made familiar to all the quarrel or, if hardly quarrel, feud between the cousins Kiartan and Bodli, or Bolli, owing to the fatal fascinations of Gudrun. Gudrun is less repulsive than Hallgerd, but she cannot be said to be entirely free from the drawbacks which, as above suggested, are apt to be found in the Icelandic heroine. It is more difficult to sentiment, if not to morality, to pardon four husbands than many times four lovers, and the only persons with whom Gudrun's relations are wholly agreeable is Kiartan, who was not her husband. But the pathos of the story, its artful unwinding, and the famous utterance of the aged heroine—

Laxdœla.

> "I did the worst to him I loved the most,"

which is almost literally from the Icelandic, redeem anything unsympathetic in the narrative: and the figure of Bodli, a strange mixture of honour and faithlessness to the friend he loves and murders, is

one of the most striking among the thralls of Venus in literature.

Eyrbyggja.

The defect of the *Eyrbyggja Saga* is its want of any central interest; for it is the history not of a person, nor even of one single family, but of a whole Icelandic district with its inhabitants from the settlement onwards. Its attraction, therefore, lies rather in episodes—the rivalry of the sorceresses Katla and Geirrid; the circumventing of the (in this case rather sinned against than sinning) bersarks Hall and Leikner; the very curious ghost-stories; and the artful ambition of Snorri the Godi. Still, to make an attractive legend of a sort of "county history" may be regarded as a rare triumph, and the saga is all the more important because it shows, almost better than any other, the real motive of nearly all these stories—that they are real *chansons de geste*, family legends, with a greater vividness and individuality than the French genius could then impart, though presented more roughly.

Egla.

The Saga of Egil Skallagrimsson, again, shifts its special points of attraction. It is the history partly of the family of Skallagrim, but chiefly of his son Egil, in opposition to Harald Harfagr and his son Eric Blood-axe, of Egil's wars and exploits in England and elsewhere, of his service to King Athelstan at Brunanburh, of the faithfulness of his friend Arinbiorn, and the hero's consequent rescue from the danger in which he had thrust himself by seeking his enemy King Eric at York, of his son's shipwreck and Egil's sad old age, and of many other

moving events. This has the most historic interest of any of the great sagas, and not least of the personal appeal. Perhaps, indeed, it is more like a really good historical novel than any other.

Grettla.

If, however, it were not for the deficiency of feminine character (a deficiency which rehandlers evidently felt and endeavoured to remedy by the expedient of tacking on an obvious plagiarism from *Tristan* as an appendix, ostensibly dealing with the avenging of the hero), the fifth, Grettis Saga or *Grettla*, would perhaps be the best of all.

Its critics.

It is true that some experts have found fault with this as late in parts, and bolstered out with extraneous matter in other respects beside the finale just referred to. The same critics denounce its poetical interludes (see *infra*) as spurious, object to some traits in it as coarse, and otherwise pick it to pieces. Nevertheless there are few sagas, if there are any, which produce so distinct and individual an effect, which remind us so constantly that we are in Iceland and not elsewhere. In pathos and variety of interest it cannot touch *Njala* or *Laxdœla:* in what is called "weirdness," in wild vigour, it surpasses, I think, all others; and the supernatural element, which is very strong, contrasts, I think, advantageously with the more business-like ghostliness of *Eyrbyggja*.

After an overture about the hero's forebears, which in any other country would be as certainly spurious as the epilogue, but to which the peculiar character of saga-writing gives a rather different claim here, the story proper begins with a description of the youth

of Grettir the Strong, second son to Asmund the Grey-haired of Biarg, who had made much money by sea-faring, and Asdis, a great heiress and of great kin. The sagaman consults poetical justice very well at first, and prepares us for an unfortunate end by depicting Grettir as, though valiant and in a way not ungenerous, yet not merely an incorrigible scapegrace, but somewhat unamiable and even distinctly ferocious. That, being made gooseherd, and finding the birds troublesome, he knocks them about, killing some goslings, may not be an unpardonable atrocity. And even when, being set to scratch his father's back, he employs a wool-comb for that purpose, much to the detriment of the paternal skin and temper, it does not very greatly go beyond the impishness of a naughty boy. But when, being promoted to mind the horses, and having a grudge against a certain "wise" mare named Keingala, because she stays out at graze longer than suits his laziness, he flays the unhappy beast alive in a broad strip from shoulder to tail, the thing goes beyond a joke. Also he is represented, throughout the saga, as invariably capping his pranks or crimes with one of the jeering enigmatic epigrams in which one finds considerable excuse for the Icelandic proneness to murder. However, in his boyhood, he does not go beyond cruelty to animals and fighting with his equals; and his first homicide, on his way with a friend of his father's to the Thing-Parliament, is in self-defence. Still, having no witnesses, he is, though powerfully backed (an all-important matter), fined and outlawed for three years. There is little love

lost between him and his father, and he is badly fitted out for the grand tour, which usually occupies a young Icelandic gentleman's first outlawry; but his mother gives him a famous sword. On the voyage he does nothing but flirt with the mate's wife: and only after strong provocation and in the worst weather consents to bale, which he does against eight men.

They are, however, wrecked off the island of Haramsey, and Grettir, lodging with the chief Thorfinn, at first disgusts folk here as elsewhere with his sulky, lazy ways. He acquires consideration, however, by breaking open the barrow of Thorfinn's father, and not only bringing out treasures (which go to Thorfinn), but fighting with and overcoming the "barrow-wight" (ghost) itself, the first of the many supernatural incidents in the story. The most precious part of the booty is a peculiar "short-sword." Also when Thorfinn's wife and house are left, weakly guarded, to the mercy of a crew of unusually ruffianly bersarks, Grettir by a mixture of craft and sheer valour succeeds in overcoming and slaying the twelve bersarks single-handed. Thorfinn on his return presents him with the short-sword and becomes his fast friend. He has plenty of opportunity: for Grettir, as usual, neither entirely by his own fault nor entirely without it, owing to his sulky temper and sour tongue, successively slays three brothers, being in the last instance saved only with the greatest difficulty by Thorfinn, his own half-brother Thorstein Dromond, and others, from the wrath of Swein, Jarl of the district. So that by the time when he can return to

Iceland, he has made Norway too hot to hold him; and he lands in his native island with a great repute for strength, valour, and, it must be added, quarrelsomeness. For some time he searches about "to see if there might be anywhere somewhat with which he might contend." He finds it at a distant farm, which is haunted by the ghost of a certain godless shepherd named Glam, who was himself killed by Evil Ones, and now molests both stock and farm-servants. Grettir dares the ghost, overcomes him after a tremendous conflict, which certainly resembles that in *Beowulf* most strikingly,[1] and slays him (for Icelandic ghosts are mortal); but not before Glam has spoken and pronounced a curse upon Grettir, that his strength, though remaining great, shall never grow, that all his luck shall cease, and, finally, that the eyes of Glam himself shall haunt him to the death.

Grettir at first cares little for this; but the last part of the curse comes on almost at once and makes him afraid to be alone after dark, while the second is not long delayed. On the eve of setting out once more for Norway, he quarrels with and slays a braggart named Thorbiorn; during the voyage itself he is the unintentional cause of a whole household of men being burnt to death; and lastly, by his own quarrelsome temper, and some "metaphysical aid," he misses

[1] It seems almost incredible that the resemblances between *Beowulf* and the *Grettis Saga* should never have struck any one till Dr Vigfusson noticed them less than twenty years ago. But the fact seems to be so; and nothing could better prove the rarity of that comparative study of literature to which this series aims at being a modest contribution and incentive.

the chance of clearing himself by "bearing iron" (ordeal) before King Olaf at Drontheim. Olaf, his own kinsman, tells him with all frankness that he, Grettir, is much too "unlucky" for himself to countenance; and that though he shall have no harm in Norway, he must pack to Iceland as soon as the sea is open. He accordingly stays during the winter, in a peace only broken by the slaying of another bersark bully, and partly passed with his brother Thorstein Dromond.

Meanwhile Asmund has died, his eldest son Atli has succeeded him, and has been waylaid by men suborned by Thorbiorn Oxmain, kinsman of the Thorbiorn whom Grettir slew before leaving Iceland the second time. Atli escapes and slays his foes. Then Thorbiorn Oxmain himself visits Biarg and slays the unarmed Atli, who is not avenged because it was Grettir's business to look after the matter when he came home. But Glam's curse so works that, though plaintiff in this case, he is outlawed in his absence for the burning of the house above referred to, in which he was quite guiltless; and when he lands in Iceland it is to find himself deprived of all legal rights, and in such case that no friend can harbour him except under penalty.

Grettir, as we might expect, is not much daunted by this complication of evils, but he lies hid for a time at his mother's house and elsewhere, not so much to escape his own dangers as to avenge Atli on Thorbiorn Oxmain at the right moment. At last he finds it; and Thorbiorn, as well as his sixteen-year-old son Arnor, who rather disloyally helps him, is slain by Grettir

single-handed. His plight at first is not much worsened by this; for though the simple plan of setting off Thorbiorn against Atli is not adopted, Grettir's case is backed directly by his kinsmen and indirectly by the two craftiest men in Iceland, Snorri the Godi and Skapti the Lawman, and the latter points out that as Grettir had been outlawed *before* it was decreed that the onus of avenging Atli lay on him, a fatal flaw had been made in the latter proceeding, and no notice could be taken of the death of Thorbiorn at all, though his kin must pay for Atli. This fine would have been set off against Grettir's outlawry, and he would have become a freeman, had not Thorir of Garth, the father of the men he had accidentally killed in the burning house, refused; and so the well-meant efforts of Grettir's kin and friends fall through.

From this time till the end of his life he is a houseless outlaw, abiding in all the most remote parts of the island—"Grettir's lairs," as they are called, it would seem, to this day—sometimes countenanced for a short time by well-willing men of position, sometimes dwelling with supernatural creatures,—Hallmund, a kindly spirit or cave-dweller with a hospitable daughter, or the half-troll giant Thorir, a person of daughters likewise. But his case grows steadily worse. Partly owing to sheer ill-luck and Glam's curse, partly, as the saga-writer very candidly tells us, because he "was not an easy man to live withal," his tale of slayings and the feuds thereto appertaining grows steadily. For the most part he lives by simple cattle-lifting and the like, which naturally does not make him popular; twice

other outlaws come to abide with him, and, after longer or shorter time, try for his richly priced head, and though they lose their own lives, naturally make him more and more desperate. Once he is beset by his enemy Thorir with eighty men; and only comes off through the backing of his ghostly friend Hallmund, who not long after meets his fate by no ignoble hand, and Grettir cannot avenge him. Again, Grettir is warmly welcomed by a widow, Steinvor of Sand-heaps, at whose dwelling, in the oddest way, he takes up the full *Beowulf* adventure and slays a troll-wife in a cave just as his forerunner slew Grendel's mother. But in the end the hue and cry is too strong, and by advice of friends he flies to the steep holm of Drangey in Holmfirth—a place where the top can only be won by ladders—with his younger brother Illugi and a single thrall or slave. Illugi is young, but true as steel: the slave is a fool, if not actually a traitor. After the bonders of Drangey have done what they could to rid themselves of this very damaging and redoubtable intruder, they give up their shares to a certain Thorbiorn Angle. Thorbiorn at first fares ill against Grettir, whose outlawry is on the point of coming to an end, as none might last longer than twenty years. With the help of a wound, witch-caused to Grettir, and the slave's treacherous laziness, Thorbiorn and his crew climb the ladders and beset the brethren—Grettir already half dead with his gangrened wound. The hero is slain with his own short-sword; the brave Illugi is overwhelmed with the shields of the eighteen assailants, and then slaughtered in cold blood.

But Thorbiorn reaps little good, for his traffickings with witchcraft deprive him of his blood-money; the deaths of his men, of whom Illugi and Grettir had slain not a few, are set against Illugi's own; and Thorbiorn himself, after escaping to Micklegarth (Constantinople) and joining the Varangians, is slain by Thorstein Dromond, who has followed him thither and joined the same Guard on purpose, and who is made the hero of the appendix above spoken of.

Merits of it.

The defects of this are obvious, and may be probably enough accounted for in part by the supposition of the experts above referred to—that the saga as we have it is rather later than the other great sagas, and is a patchwork of divers hands. It may perhaps be added, as a more purely literary criticism, that no one of these hands can have been quite a master, or that his work, if it existed, must have been mutilated or disfigured by others. For the most is nowhere made, except in the Glam fight and the last scenes on Drangey, of the admirable situations provided by the story; and the presentation of Grettir as a man almost everywhere lacks the last touches, while the sagaman has simply thrown away the opportunities afforded him by the insinuated amourettes with Steinvor and the daughters of the friendly spirits, and has made a mere *fabliau* episode of another thing of the kind. Nevertheless the attractions of *Grettla* are unique as regards the mixture of the natural and supernatural; not inferior to any other as illustrating the quaintly blended life of Iceland; and of the highest kind as regards the conception of the hero—

a not ungenerous Strength, guided by no intellectual greatness and by hardly any overmastering passion, marred by an unsocial and overbearing temper, and so hardly needing the ill luck, which yet gives poetical finish and dramatic force to the story, to cast itself utterly away. For in stories, as in other games, play without luck is fatiguing and jejune, luck without play childish. It is curious how touching is the figure of the ill-fated hero, not wholly amiable, yet overmatched by Fortune, wandering in waste places of a country the fairest spots of which are little better than a desert, forced by his terror of "Glam-sight" to harbour criminals far worse than himself, and well knowing that they seek his life, grudgingly and fearfully helped by his few friends, a public nuisance where he should have been a public champion, only befriended heartily by mysterious shadowy personages of whom little is positively told, and when, after twenty years of wild-beast life, his deliverance is at hand, perishing by a combination of foul play on the part of his foes and neglect on that of his slave. At least once, too, in that parting of Asdis with Grettir and Illugi, which ranks not far below the matchless epitaph of Sir Ector on Lancelot, there is not only suggestion, but expression of the highest quality:—

The parting of Asdis and her sons.

"'Ah! my sons twain, there ye depart from me, and one death ye shall have together, for no man may flee from that which is wrought for him. On no day now shall I see either of you once again. Let one fate, then, be over you both; for I know not what weal ye go to get for yourselves

in Drangey, but there ye shall both lay your bones, and many shall grudge you that abiding-place. Keep ye heedfully from wiles, for marvellously have my dreams gone. Be well ware of sorcery; yet none the less shall ye be bitten with the edge of the sword, for nothing can cope with the cunning of eld.' And when she had thus spoken she wept right sore. Then said Grettir, 'Weep not, mother; for if we be set upon by weapons it shall be said of thee that thou hast had sons and not daughters.' And therewith they parted."

Great passages of the sagas.

These moments, whether of incident or expression, are indeed frequent enough in the sagas, though the main attraction may consist, as has been said, in the wild interest of the story and the vivid individuality of the characters. The slaying of Gunnar of Lithend in *Njala*, when his false wife refuses him a tress of hair to twist for his stringless bow, has rightly attracted the admiration of the best critics; as has the dauntless resignation of Njal himself and Bergthora, when both might have escaped their fiery fate. Of the touches of which the Egil's Saga is full, few are better perhaps than the picture in a dozen words of King Eric Blood-axe "sitting bolt upright and glaring" at the son of Skallagrim as he delivers the panegyric which is to save his life, and the composition of which had been so nearly baulked by the twittering of the witch-swallow under his eaves. The "long" kisses of Kormak and Steingerd, and the poet's unconscious translation of Æschylus[1]

[1] Compare, *mutatis mutandis*, *Agam.*, 410 *sq.*, and Kormak's "Stray verses," ll. 41-44, in the *Corpus*, ii. 65.

as he says, "Eager to find my lady, I have scoured the whole house with the glances of my eyes — in vain," dwell in the memory as softer touches. And for the sterner, nothing can beat the last fight of Olaf Trygveson, where with the crack of Einar Tamberskelvir's bow Norway breaks from Olaf's hands, and the king himself, the last man with Kolbiorn his marshal to fight on the deck of the Long Serpent, springs, gold-helmed, mail-coated, and scarlet-kirtled, into the waves, and sinks with shield held up edgeways[1] to weight him through the deep green water.

Style.

The saga prose is straightforward and business-like, the dialogue short and pithy, with considerable interspersion of proverbial phrase, but with, except in case of bad texts, very little obscurity. It is, however, much interspersed also with verses which, like Icelandic verse in general, are alliterative in prosody, and often of the extremest euphuism and extravagance in phrase. All who have even a slight acquaintance with sagas know the extraordinary periphrases for common objects, for men and maidens, for ships and swords, that bestrew them. There is, I believe, a theory, not in itself improbable, that the more elaborate and far-fetched the style of this imagery, the later and less genuine is likely to be the poem, if not the saga; but it is certain that the germs of the style are to be found

[1] *Heimskringla* does not *say* "edgeways," but this is the clear meaning. Kolbiorn held his shield flat and below him, so that it acted as a float, and he was taken. Olaf sank.

in the *Havamal* and the other earliest and most certainly genuine examples.

It is perhaps well to add that very small sagas are called *thættir* ("scraps"), the same word as "tait" in the Scots phrase "tait of wool." But it is admitted that it is not particularly easy to draw the line between the two, and that there is no difference in real character. In fact short sagas might be called *thættir* and *vice versâ*. Also, as hinted before, there is exceedingly little comedy in the sagas. The roughest horse-play in practical joking, the most insolent lampoons in verbal satire, form, as a rule, the lighter element; and pieces like the *Bandamanna Saga*, which with tragic touches is really comic in the main, are admittedly rare.

Provençal mainly lyric.

In regard to the second, and contrasted, division of the subject of the present chapter, it has been already noted that, just as Icelandic at this period presents to the purview of the comparative literary historian one main subject, if not one only—the saga—so Provençal presents one main subject, and almost one only—the formal lyric. The other products of the Muse in *langue d'oc*, whether verse or prose, are so scanty, and in comparison[1] so unim-

[1] Of course this is only in comparison. For instance, in Dr Suchier's *Denkmäler* (Halle, 1883), which contains nearly 500 large pages of Provençal *anecdota*, about four-fifths is devotional matter of various kinds and in various forms, prose and verse. But such matter, which is common to all mediæval languages, is hardly literature at all, being usually translated, with scarcely any expense of literary originality, from the Latin, or each other.

portant, that even special historians of the subject have found but little to say about them. The earliest monument of all, perhaps the earliest finished monument of literature in any Romance language, the short poem on Boethius, in assonanced decasyllabic *laisses*,—even in its present form probably older than our starting-point, and, it may be, two centuries older in its first form,—is indeed not lyrical; nor is the famous and vigorous verse-history of the Albigensian War in *chanson* style; nor the scanty remnants of other *chansons, Girart de Rossilho, Daurel et Beton, Aigar et Maurin*, which exist; nor the later *romans d'aventure* of *Jaufre, Flamenca, Blandin of Cornwall*. But in this short list almost everything of interest in our period—the flourishing period of the literature—has been mentioned which is not lyrical.[1] And if these things, and others like them in much larger number, had existed alone, it is certain that Provençal literature would not hold the place which it now holds in the comparative literary history of Europe.

That place is due to its lyric, construing that term in a wide sense such as that (but indeed a little wider) in which it has been already used with reference to the kindred and nearly contemporary lyric of France proper. It is best to say "nearly contemporary," because it would appear that Provençal actually had

[1] Alberic's *Alexander* (*v.* chap. iv.) is of course Provençal in a way, and there was probably a Provençal intermediary between the *Chanson d'Antioche* and the Spanish *Gran Conquesta de Ultramar*. But we have only a few lines of the first and nothing of the second.

the start of French in this respect, though no great start: and it is best to say "kindred" and not "daughter," because though some forms and more names are common to the two, their developments are much more parallel than on the same lines, and they are much more sisters than mother and daughter.

Origin of this lyric.

It would appear, though such things can never be quite certain, that, as we should indeed expect, the first developments of Provençal lyric were of the hymn kind, and perhaps originally mixtures of Romance and Latin. This mixture of the vernacular and the learned tongues, both spoken in all probability with almost equal facility by the writer, is naturally not uncommon in the Middle Ages: and it helps to explain the rapid transference of the Latin hymn-rhythms to vernacular verse. Thus we have a *Noel* or Christmas poem not only written to the tune and in the measure of a Latin hymn, *In hoc anni circulo*, not only crowning the Provençal six-syllable triplets with a Latin refrain, "De virgine Maria," and other variations on the Virgin's title and name, but with Latin verses alternate to the Provençal ones. This same arrangement occurs with a Provençal fourth rhyme, which seems to have been a favourite one. It is arranged with a variety which shows its earliness, for the fourth line is sometimes "in the air" rhyming to nothing, sometimes rhymes with the other three, and sometimes forces its sound on the last of them, so that the quatrain becomes a pair of couplets.

The earliest purely secular lyrics, however, are attributed to William IX., Count of Poitiers, who was

a crusader in the very first year of the twelfth century, and is said to have written an account of his journey which is lost. His lyrics survive to the number of some dozen, and show that the art had by his time received very considerable development. For their form, it may suffice to say that of those given by Bartsch[1] the first is in seven-lined stanzas, rhymed *aaaabab*, the *a*-rhyme lines being iambic dimeters, and the *b*'s monometers. Number two has five six-lined stanzas, all dimeters, rhymed *aaabab*: and a four-lined finale, rhymed *ab*, *ab*. The third is mono-rhymed throughout, the lines being dissyllabic with licence to extend. And the fourth is in the quatrain *aaab*, but with the *b* rhyme identical throughout, capped with a couplet *ab*. If these systems be compared with the exact accounts of early French, English, and German lyric in chapters v.-vii., it will be seen that Provençal probably, if not certainly, led the way in thus combining rhythmic arrangement and syllabic proportion with a cunning variation of rhyme-sound. It was also the first language to classify

Forms.

[1] The *Grundriss zur Geschichte der Provenzalischen Literatur* (Elberfeld, 1872) and the *Chrestomathie Provençale* (3d ed., Elberfeld, 1875) of this excellent scholar will not soon be obsolete, and may, in the peculiar conditions of the case, suffice all but special students in a degree hardly possible in any other literature. Mahn's *Troubadours* and the older works of Raynouard and Fauriel are the chief storehouses of wider information, and separate editions of the works of the chief poets are being accumulated by modern, chiefly German, scholars. An interesting and valuable addition to the *English* literature of the subject has been made, since the text was written, by Miss Ida Farnell's *Lives of the Troubadours*, a translation with added specimens of the poets and other editorial matter.

poetry, as it may be called, by assigning special forms to certain kinds of subject or—if not quite this—to constitute classes of poems themselves according to their arrangement in line, stanza, and rhyme. A complete prosody of the language of *canso* and *sirvente*, of *vers* and *cobla*, of *planh*, *tenso*, *tornejamens*, *balada*, *retroensa*, and the rest, would take more room than can be spared here, and would hardly be in place if it were otherwise. All such prosodies tend rather to the childish, as when, for instance, the *pastorela*, or shepherdess poem in general, was divided into *porquiera*, *cabreira*, *auqueira*, and other things, according as the damsel's special wards were pigs or goats or geese. Perhaps the most famous, peculiar, and representative of Provençal forms are the *alba*, or poem of morning parting, and the *sirvente*, or poem *not* of love. The *sestina*, a very elaborate canzonet, was invented in Provence and borrowed by the Italians. But it is curious to find that the sonnet, the crown and flower of all artificial poetry, though certainly invented long before the decadence of Provençal, was only used in Provençal by Italian experimenters. The poets proper of the *langue d'oc* were probably too proud to admit any form that they had not invented themselves.

Many men, one mind.

Next in noteworthiness to the variety of form of the Provençal poets is their number. Even the multitude of *trouvères* and Minnesingers dwindles beside the list of four hundred and sixty named poets, for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries only, which Bartsch's list contains; some, it is true, credited with only a single piece, but others

with ten, twenty, fifty, or even close to a hundred, not to mention an anonymous appendix of over two hundred and fifty poems more. Great, however, as is the bulk of this division of literature, hardly any has more distinct and uniform — its enemies may say more monotonous—characteristics. It is not entirely composed of love-poetry; but the part devoted to this is so very much the largest, and so very much the most characteristic, that popular and almost traditional opinion is scarcely wrong in considering love-poetry and Provençal poetry to be almost, and with the due limitation in the first case, convertible terms.

The spirit of this poetry is nowhere better shown than in the refrain of an anonymous *alba*, which begins—

"En un verger sotz folha d'albespi,"

and which has for burden—

"Oi deus! oi deus, de l'alba, tant tost ve!"

of which an adaptation by Mr Swinburne is well known. "In the Orchard," however, is not only a much longer poem than the *alba* from which it borrows its burden, but is couched in a form much more elaborate, and has a spirit rather early Italian than Provençal. It is, indeed, not very easy to define the Provençal spirit itself, which has sometimes been mistaken, and oftener exaggerated. Although the average troubadour poem—whether of love, or of satire, or, more rarely, of war—is much less simple in tone than the Northern lyric already commented on, it cannot be said to be very complex; and, on the

whole, the ease, accomplishment, and, within certain strict limits, variety of the form are more remarkable than any intensity or volume of passion or of thought. The musical character (less inarticulate and more regular), which has also been noted in the poems of the *trouvères*, is here eminent: though the woodnote wild of the Minnesinger is quite absent or very rarely present. The facility of double rhymes, with a full vowel sound in each syllable, has a singular and very pleasing effect, as in the piece by Marcabrun beginning—

"L'autrier jost una sebissa,"

"the other day by a hedge," the curiously complicated construction of which is worth dwelling on as a specimen. It consists of six double stanzas, of fourteen lines or two septets each, finished by a sestet, *aabaab*. The septets are rhymed *aaabaab;* and though the *a* rhymes vary in each set of fourteen, the *b* rhymes are the same throughout; and the first of them in each septet is the same word, *vilana* (peasant girl), throughout. Thus we have as the rhymes of the first twenty-eight lines *sebissa, mestissa, massissa, vilana, pelissa, treslissa, lana; planissa, faitissa, fissa, vilana, noirissa, m'erissa, sana; pia, via, companhia, vilana, paria, bestia, soldana; sia, folia, parelharia, vilana, s'estia, bailia, l'ufana.*

Example of rhyme-schemes.

Such a *carillon* of rhymes as this is sometimes held to be likely to concentrate the attention of both writer and reader too much on the accompaniment, and to leave the former little time to convey, and the latter little chance of receiving,

Provençal poetry not great.

any very particularly choice sense. This most certainly cannot be laid down as a universal law; there are too many examples to the contrary, even in our own language, not to go further. But it may be admitted that when the styles of literature are both fashionable and limited, and when a very large number of persons endeavour to achieve distinction in them, there is some danger of something of the sort coming about. No nation has ever been able, in the course of less than two centuries, to provide four hundred and sixty named poets and an indefinitely strong reinforcement of anonyms, all of whom have native power enough to produce verse at once elaborate in form and sovereign in spirit; and the peoples of the *langue d'oc*, who hardly together formed a nation, were no exception to the rule. That rule is a rule of "minor poetry," accomplished, scholarly, agreeable, but rarely rising out of minority.

But extraordinarily pedagogic.

Yet their educating influence was undoubtedly strong, and their actual production not to be scorned. In the capacity of teachers they were not without strong influence on their Northern countrymen; they certainly and positively acted as direct masters to the literary lyric both of Italy and Spain; they at least shared with the *trouvères* the position of models to the Minnesingers. It is at first sight rather surprising that, considering the intimate relations between England and Aquitaine during the period—considering that at least one famous troubadour, Bertran de Born, is known to have been concerned in the disputes between Henry II. and his

sons — Provençal should not have exercised more direct influence over English literature. It was a partly excusable mistake which made some English critics, who knew that Richard Cœur de Lion, for instance, was himself not unversed in the "manner of *trobar*," assert or assume, until within the present century, that it did exercise such influence. But, as a matter of fact, it did not; and the reason is sufficiently simple, or at least (for it is double rather than simple) sufficiently clear.

Though not directly on English.

In the first place, English was not, until quite the end of the flourishing period of Provençal poetry, and specially at the period above referred to, in a condition to profit by Provençal models; while in the fourteenth century, when English connection with the south of France was closer still, Provençal was in its decadence. And, in the second place, the structure and spirit of the two tongues almost forbade imitation of the one in the other. It was Northern, not Southern, French that helped to make English proper out of Anglo-Saxon; and the gap between Northern French and Southern French themselves was far wider than between Provençal and the Peninsular tongues. To which things, if any one pleases, he may add the difference of the spirit of the two races; but this is always vague and uncertain ground, and is best avoided when we can tread on the firm land of history and literature proper. Such a rhyme-arrangement as that above set forth is probably impossible in English; even now it will be observed that Mr Swinburne,

the greatest master of double and treble rhymes that we have ever had, rarely succeeds in giving even the former with a full spondaic effect of vowel such as is easy in Provençal. In "The Garden of Proserpine" itself, as in the double rhymes, where they occur, of "The Triumph of Time" (the greatest thing ever written in the Provençal manner, and greater than anything in Provençal), the second vowels of the rhymes are never full. And there too, as I think invariably in English, the poet shows his feeling of the intolerableness of continued double rhyme by making the odd verses rhyme plump and with single sound.

Of poetry so little remarkable in individual manner or matter it is impossible to give abstracts, such as those which have been easy, and it may be hoped profitable, in some of the foregoing chapters; and prolonged analyses of form are tedious, except to the expert and the enthusiast. With some brief account, therefore, of the persons who chiefly composed this remarkable mass of lyric we may close a notice of the subject which is superficially inadequate to its importance, but which, perhaps, will not seem so to those who are content not merely to count pages but to weigh moments. The moment which Provençal added to the general body of force in European literature was that of a limited, somewhat artificial, but at the same time exquisitely artful and finished lyrical form, so adapted to the most inviting of the perennial motives of literature that it was sure to lead to imitation and development. It gave means and held up models

to those who were able to produce greater effects than are to be found in its own accomplishment: yet was not its accomplishment, despite what is called its monotony, despite its limits and its defects, other than admirable and precious.

Some troubadours.

The "first warbler," Count William IX. of Poitiers, has already been mentioned, and his date fixed at exactly the first year of our period. His chief immediate successors or contemporaries were Cercamon ("Cherchemonde," *Cursor Mundi*); the above quoted Marcabrun, who is said to have accompanied Cercamon in his wanderings, and who has left much more work; and Bertrand de Ventadorn or Ventadour, perhaps the best of the group, a farmer's son of the place from which he takes his noble-sounding name, and a professional lover of the lady thereof. Of Jaufre (Geoffrey) Rudel of Blaye, whose love for the lady of Tripoli, never yet seen by him, and his death at first sight of her, supply, with the tragedy of Cabestanh and the cannibal banquet, the two most famous pieces of Troubadour anecdotic history, we have half-a-dozen pieces. In succession to these, Count Rambaut of Orange and Countess Beatrice of Die keep up the reputation of the *gai saber* as an aristocratic employment, and the former's poem—

"Escoutatz mas no sai que s'es"

(in six-lined stanzas, rhymed *ababab*, with prose "tags" to each, something in the manner of the modern comic song), is at least a curiosity. The primacy of the

whole school in its most flourishing time, between 1150 and 1250, is disputed by Arnaut Daniel (a great master of form, and as such venerated by his greater Italian pupils) and Giraut de Bornelh, who is more fully represented in extant work than most of his fellows, as we have more than fourscore pieces of his. Peire or Peter Vidal, another typical troubadour, who was a crusader, an exceedingly ingenicus verse-smith, a great lover, and a proficient in the fantastic pranks which rather brought the school into discredit, inasmuch as he is said to have run about on all fours in a wolfskin in honour of his mistress Loba (Lupa); Gaucelm Faidit and Arnaut de Maroilh, Folquet of Marseilles, and Rambaut of Vaqueras; the Monk of Montaudon and Bertrand de Born himself, who with Peire Cardinal is the chief satirist (though the satire of the two takes different forms); Guillem Figueira, the author of a long invective against Rome, and Sordello of mysterious and contingent fame,—are other chief members, and of some of them we have early, perhaps contemporary, *Lives*, or at least anecdotes. For instance, the Cabestanh or Cabestaing story comes from these. The last name of importance in our period, if not the last of the right troubadours, is usually taken to be that of Guiraut Riquier.

Criticism of Provençal.

It would scarcely be fair to say that the exploit attributed to Rambaut of Vaqueras, a poet of the very palmiest time, at the juncture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—that of composing a poem in lines written successively in three different

forms of Provençal (*langue d'oc* proper, Gascon, and Catalan), in *langue d'oïl*, and in Italian, with a *coda* line jumbled up of all five—is a final criticism at once of the merits and the defects of this literature. But it at least indicates the lines of such a criticism. By its marvellous suppleness, sweetness, and adaptation to the verbal and metrical needs of poetry, Provençal served—in a fashion probably impossible to the stiffer if more virile tongues—as an example in point of form to these tongues themselves: and it achieved, at the same time with a good deal of mere gymnastic, exercises in form of the most real and abiding beauty. But it had as a language too little character of its own, and was too fatally apt to shade into the other languages—French on the one hand, Spanish and Italian on the other—with which it was surrounded, and to which it was akin. And coming to perfection at a time when no modern thought was distinctly formed, when positive knowledge was at a low ebb, and when it had neither the stimulus of vigorous national life nor the healthy occupation of what may be called varied literary business, it tended to become, on the whole, too much of a plaything merely. Now, schools and playgrounds are both admirable things, and necessary to man; but what is done in both is only an exercise or a relaxation from exercise. Neither man nor literature can stay either in class-room or playing-field for ever, and Provençal had scarcely any other places of abode to offer.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LITERATURE OF THE PENINSULAS.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS CHAPTER—LATE GREEK ROMANCE—ITS DIFFICULTIES AS A SUBJECT—ANNA COMNENA, ETC.—'HYSMINIAS AND HYSMINE'—ITS STYLE—ITS STORY—ITS HANDLING—ITS "DECADENCE"—LATENESS OF ITALIAN—THE "SARACEN" THEORY—THE "FOLK-SONG" THEORY—CIULLO D'ALCAMO—HEAVY DEBT TO FRANCE—YET FORM AND SPIRIT BOTH ORIGINAL—LOVE-LYRIC IN DIFFERENT EUROPEAN COUNTRIES—POSITION OF SPANISH—CATALAN-PROVENÇAL—GALICIAN-PORTUGUESE—CASTILIAN—BALLADS?—THE 'POEMA DEL CID'—A SPANISH "CHANSON DE GESTE"—IN SCHEME AND SPIRIT—DIFFICULTIES OF ITS PROSODY—BALLAD-METRE THEORY—IRREGULARITY OF LINE—OTHER POEMS—APOLLONIUS AND MARY OF EGYPT—BERCEO—ALFONSO EL SABIO.

Limitations of this chapter.

THERE is something more than a freak, or a mere geographical adaptation, in taking together, and at the last, the contributions of the three peninsulas which form the extreme south of Europe. For in the present scheme they form, as it were, but an appendix to the present book. The dying literature of Greece—if indeed it be not more proper to describe this phase of Byzantine writing as ghostly rather than moribund—presents at most but one point of interest, and that rather a *Frage*, a thesis,

than a solid literary contribution. The literature of Italy prior to the fourteenth century is such a daughter of Provençal on the one hand, and is so much more appropriately to be taken in connection with Dante than by itself on the other, that it can claim admission only to be, as it were, "laid on the table." And that of Spain, though full of attraction, had also but just begun, and yields but one certain work of really high importance, the *Poema del Cid*, for serious comment in our pages. In the case of Spain, and still more in that of Italy, the scanty honour apparently paid here will be amply made up in other volumes of the series. As much can hardly be said of Greece. Conscientious chroniclers of books may, indeed, up to the sixteenth century find something which, though scarcely literature, is at any rate written matter. And at the very last there is the attempt, rather respectable than successful, to re-create at once the language and the literature, for the use of Greeks who are at least questionably Hellenic, in relation to forms and subjects separated by more than a millennium—by nearly two millennia — from the forms and the subjects in regard to which Greek was once a living speech. But Greek literature, the living literary contribution of Greek to Europe, almost ceases with the latest poets of the Anthology.

Late Greek romance.

In what has been called the "ghost" time, however, in that portion of it which belongs to our present period, there is one shadow that flutters with a nearer approach to substance than most. Some glance has been made above at the

question, "What was the exact relation between western romance and that later form of Greek novel-writing of which the chief relic is the *Hysminias and Hysmine*[1] of Eustathius Macrembolita?" Were these stories, many of which must be lost, or have not yet been recovered, direct, and in their measure original and independent, continuations of the earlier school of Greek romance proper? Did they in that case, through the Crusades or otherwise, come under the notice of the West, and serve as stimulants, if not even directly as patterns, to the far greater achievements of Western romance itself? Do they, on the other hand, owe something to models still farther East? Or are they, as has sometimes been hinted, copies of Western romance itself? Had the still ingenious, though hopelessly effeminate, Byzantine mind caught up the literary style of the visitors it feared but could not keep out?

Its difficulties as a subject.

All these questions are questions exceedingly proper to be stated in a book of this kind; not quite so proper to be worked out in it, even if the working out were possible. But it is impossible for two causes — want of room, which might not be fatal; and want of ascertained fact, which cannot but be so. Despite the vigorous work of recent generations on all literary and historical subjects, no one has yet succeeded, and until some one more patient of investigation than fertile in theory arises, no one is likely to succeed, in laying

[1] Ed. Hercher, *Erotici Scriptores Græci* (2 vols., Leipzig, 1858), ii. 161-286.

down the exact connection between Eastern, Western, and, as go-between, Byzantine literature. Even in matters which are the proper domain of history itself, such as those of the Trojan and Alexandrine Apocryphas, much is still in the vague. In the case of Western Romance, of the later Greek stories, and of such Eastern matter as, for instance, the story of Sharkan and that of Zumurrud and her master in the *Arabian Nights*, the vague rules supreme. There were, perhaps, *trouvère*-knights in the garrisons of Edessa or of Jôf who could have told us all about it. But nobody did tell: or if anybody did, the tale has not survived.

Anna Comnena, &c.

But this interest of problem is not the only one that attaches to the "drama," as he calls it, of Eustathius or Eumathius "the philosopher," who flourished at some time between the twelfth and the fourteenth century, and is therefore pretty certainly ours. For the purposes of literary history the book deserves to be taken as the typical contribution of Greek during the period, much better than the famous *Alexiad* of Anna Comnena[1] in history, or the verse romances of Eustathius's probable contemporaries Theodorus Prodromus[2] and Nicetas Eugenianus.[2] The princess's book, though historically important, and by no means disagreeable to read, is, as literature, chiefly remarkable as exhibiting the ease and the comparative success with which Greek lent itself to the formation of an artificial *style noble*, more like the writing of the average (not the better) Frenchman

[1] Ed. Reifferscheid. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1884.

[2] Following Eustathius in Hercher, *op. cit.*

of the eighteenth century than it is like anything else. It is this peculiarity which has facilitated the construction of the literary *pastiche* called Modern Greek, and perhaps it is this which will long prevent the production of real literature in that language or pseudo-language. On the other hand, the books of Theodorus and Nicetas, devoted, according to rule, to the loves respectively of Rhodanthe and Dosicles, of Charicles and Drosilla, are written in iambic trimeters of the very worst and most wooden description. It is doubtful whether even the great Tragic poets could have made the trimeter tolerable as the vehicle of a long story. In the hands of Theodorus and Nicetas its monotony becomes utterly sickening, while the level of the composition of neither is much above that of a by no means gifted schoolboy, even if we make full allowance for the changes in prosody, and especially in quantity, which had set in for Greek as they had for other languages. The question whether these iambics are more or less terrible than the "political verses"[1] of the Wise Manasses,[2] which usually accompany them in editions, and which were apparently inserted in what must have been the inconceivably dreary romance of "Aristander and Callithea," must be left to individual taste to decide. Manasses also wrote a History of the World in the same rhythm, and it is possible that he may have occasionally forgotten which of the two books he was writing at any given time.

[1] These political verses are fifteen-syllabled, with a cæsura at the eighth, and in a rhythm ostensibly accentual.

[2] *Erotici Scriptores*, ii. 555.

But *Hysminias and Hysmine*[1] has interests of character which distinguish its author and itself, not merely from the herd of chroniclers and commentators who make up the bulk of Byzantine literature so-called, but even from such more respectable but somewhat featureless work as Anna Comnena's. It is not a good book; but it is by no means so extremely bad as the traditional judgment (not always, perhaps, based on or buttressed by direct acquaintance with the original) is wont to give out. On one at least of the sides of this interest it is quite useless to read it except in the original, for the attraction is one of style. Neither Lyly nor any of our late nineteenth-century "stylists" has outgone, perhaps none has touched, Eustathius in euphuism. It is needless to say that while the simplicity of the best Greek style usually prefers the most direct and natural order, its suppleness lends itself to almost any gymnastic, and its lucidity prevents total confusion from arising. Eustathius has availed himself of these opportunities for "raising his mother tongue to a higher power" to the very utmost. No translation can do justice to the elaborate foppery of even the first sentence,[2] with its coquetry

Hysminias and Hysmine.

Its style.

[1] Sometimes spelt *Ismenias and Ismene.* I believe it was first published in an Italian translation of the late Renaissance, and it has appeared in other languages since. But it is only worth reading in its own.

[2] Πόλις Εὐρύκωμις καὶ τἆλλα μὲν ἀγαθὴ, ὅτι καὶ θαλάττῃ στεφανοῦται καὶ ποταμοῖς καταρρεῖται καὶ λειμῶσι κομᾷ καὶ τρυφαῖς εὐθηνεῖται παντοδαπαῖς, τὰ δ' εἰς θεοὺς εὐσεβής, καὶ ὑπὲρ τὰς χρυσᾶς Ἀθήνας ὅλη βωμός, ὅλη θῦμα, θεοῖς ἀνάθημα.

of arrangement, its tormented structure of phrase, its jingle of sound-repetition, its desperate rejection of simplicity in every shape and form. To describe precisely the means resorted to would take a chapter at least. They are astonishingly modern—the present tense, the use of catchwords like ὅλος, the repetitions and jingles above referred to. Excessively elaborate description of word-painting, though modern too, can hardly be said to be a novelty: it had distinguished most of the earlier Greek novelists, especially Achilles Tatius. But there is something in the descriptions of *Hysminias and Hysmine* more mediæval than those of Achilles, more like the *Romance of the Rose*, to which, indeed, there is a curious resemblance of atmosphere in the book. Triplets of epithet—"a man athirst, and parched, and boiling"— meet us. There is a frequent economy of conjunctions. There is the resort to personification—for instance, in the battle of Love and Shame, which serves as climax to the elaborate description of the lovers' kissing. In short, all our old friends—the devices which every generation of seekers after style parades with such a touching conviction that they are quite new, and which every literary student knows to be as old as literature—are to be found here. The language is in its decadence: the writer has not much to say. But it is surprising how much, with all his drawbacks, he accomplishes.

Whether the book, either as an individual composition, or more probably as a member of an extinct class, is as important in matter and in tone as it is in style is more doubtful. The style itself, as to which there

is no doubt, may perhaps colour the matter too much. All that can be safely said is that it reads with distinctly modern effect after Heliodorus and Achilles, Longus and Xenophon The story is not much. Hysminias, a beautiful youth of the city of Eurycomis, is chosen for a religious embassy or *kerukeia* to the neighbouring town of Aulicomis. The task of acting as host to him falls on one Sosthenes, whose daughter Hysmine strikes Hysminias with love at first sight. The progress of their passion is facilitated by the pretty old habit of girls acting as cupbearers, and favoured by accident to no small degree, the details of the courtship being sometimes luscious, but adjusted to less fearless old fashions than the wooings of Chloe or of Melitta. Adventures by land and sea follow; and, of course, a happy ending.

Its story.

But what is really important is the way in which these things are handled. It has as mere story-telling little merit: the question is whether the spirit, the conduct, the details, do not show a temper much more akin to mediæval than to classical treatment. I think they do. Hysminias is rather a silly, and more than rather a chicken-hearted, fellow; his conduct on board ship when his beloved incurs the fate of Jonah is eminently despicable: but then he was countryman *ex hypothesi* of Mourzoufle, not of Villehardouin. The "battailous" spirit of the West is not to be expected in a Byzantine sophist. Whether something of its artistic and literary spirit is not to be detected in him is a more doubtful question. For my part, I cannot read of Hysmine without being re-

Its handling.

minded of Nicolette, as I am never reminded in other parts of the *Scriptores Erotici*.

Its "decadence."

Yet, experiment or remainder, imitation or original, one cannot but feel that the book, like all the literature to which it belongs, has more of the marks of death than of life in it. Its very elegances are "rose-coloured curtains for the doctors" —the masque of a moribund art. Some of them may have been borrowed by, rather than from, younger and hopefuller craftsmanship, but the general effect is the same. We are here face to face with those phenomena of "decadence," which, though they have often been exaggerated and wrongly interpreted, yet surely exist and reappear at intervals — the contortions of style that cannot afford to be natural, the tricks of word borrowed from literary reminiscence (ὅλος itself in this way is at least as old as Lucian), the tormented effort at detail of description, at "analysis" of thought and feeling, of incident and moral. The cant phrase about being "*né trop tard dans un monde trop vieux*" has been true of many persons, while more still have affected to believe it true of themselves, since Eustathius: it is not much truer of any one than of him.

Curious as such specimens of a dying literature may be, it cannot but be refreshing to go westward from it to the nascent literatures of Italy and of Spain, literatures which have a future instead of merely a past, and which, independently of that somewhat illegitimate advantage, have characteristics not unable to bear comparison with those of the past, even had it existed.

Between the earliest Italian and the earliest Spanish literature, however, there are striking differences to be noted. Persons ignorant of the usual course of literary history might expect in Italian a regular and unbroken development, literary as well as linguistic, of Latin. But, as a matter of fact, the earliest vernacular literature in Italy shows very little trace of classical influence[1]: and though that influence appears strongly in the age immediately succeeding ours, and helps to produce the greatest achievements of the language, it may be questioned whether its results were wholly beneficial. In the earliest Italian, or rather Sicilian, poetry quite different influences are perceptible. One of them—the influence of the literatures of France, both Southern and Northern—is quite certain and incontestable. The intercourse between the various Romance-speaking nations surrounding the western Mediterranean was always close; and the development of Provençal literature far anticipated, both in date and form, that of any other. Moreover, some northern influence was undoubtedly communicated by the Norman conquests of the eleventh century.

Lateness of Italian.

[1] I have not thought it proper, considering the system of excluding mere hypothesis which I have adopted, to give much place here to that interesting theory of modern "Romanists" which will have it that Latin classical literature was never much more than a literary artifice, and that the modern Romance tongues and literatures connect directly, through that famous *lingua romana rustica* and earlier forms of it, vigorous though inarticulate, in classical times themselves, with primitive poetry—"Saturnian," "Fescennine," and what not. All this is interesting, and it cannot be said, in the face of inscriptions, of the scraps of popular speech in the classics, &c., to be entirely guess-work. But a great deal of it is.

But two other strains—one of which has long been asserted with the utmost positiveness, while the latter has been a favourite subject of Italian patriotism since the political unification of the country—are much more dubious. Because it is tolerably certain that Italian poetry in the modern literary sense arose in Sicily, and because Sicily was beyond all doubt almost more Saracen than Frank up to the twelfth century, it was long, and has not quite ceased to be, the fashion to assign a great, if not the greatest, part to Arabian literature. Not merely the sonnet (which seems to have arisen in the two Sicilies), but even the entire system of rhymed lyrical verse, common in the modern languages, has been thus referred to the East by some.

The "Saracen" theory.

This matter can probably never be pronounced upon, with complete satisfaction to readers, except by a literary critic who is equally competent in Eastern and Western history and literature, a person who certainly has not shown himself as yet. What can be said with some confidence is, that the Saracen theory of Literature, like the Saracen theory of Architecture, so soon as it is carried beyond the advancing of a possible but slight and very indeterminate influence and colouring, has scarcely the slightest foundation in known facts, and is very difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with facts that are known, while it is intrinsically improbable to the very highest degree. As has been pointed out above, the modern prosody of Europe is quite easily and logically explicable as the result of the juxtaposition of the Latin rhythms of the Church service, and the

verse systems indigenous in the different barbaric nations. That the peculiar cast and colour of early Italian poetry may owe something of that difference which it exhibits, even in comparison with Provencal, much more with French, most of all with Teutonic poetry, to contact with Arabian literature, is not merely possible but probable. Anything more must be regarded as not proven, and not even likely.

The "folk-song" theory.

Of late, however, attempts have been made to assign the greater part of the matter to no foreign influence whatever, but to native folk-songs, in which at the present time, and no doubt for a long time back, Italy is beyond all question rich above the wont of European countries. But this attempt, however interesting and patriotic, labours under the same fatal difficulties which beset similar attempts in other languages. It may be regarded as perfectly certain that we do not possess any Italian popular poem in any form which can have existed prior to the thirteenth century; and only such poems would be of any use. To argue, as is always argued in such cases, that existing examples show, by this or that characteristic, that in other forms they must have existed in the twelfth century or even earlier, is only an instance of that learned childishness which unfortunately rules so widely in literary, though it has been partly expelled from general, history. "May have been" and "must have been" are phrases of no account to a sound literary criticism, which insists upon "was." And in reference to this particular subject of Early Italian Poetry the reader may be

referred to the very learned dissertation[1] of Signor Alessandro d'Ancona on the *Contrasto* of Ciullo d'Alcamo, which has been commonly regarded as the first specimen of Italian poetry, and has been claimed for the beginning of the thirteenth century, if not the end of the twelfth. He will, if the gods have made him in the least critical, rise from the perusal with the pretty clear notion that whether Ciullo d'Alcamo was "such a person," or whether he was Cielo dal Camo; whether the *Contrasto* was written on the bridge of the twelfth and thirteenth century, or fifty years later; whether the poet was a warrior of high degree or an obscure folk-singer; whether his dialect has been Tuscanised or is still Sicilian with French admixture,—these are things not to be found out, things of mere opinion and hypothesis, things good to write programmes and theses on, but only to be touched in the most gingerly manner by sober history.

Ciullo d'Alcamo.

To the critic, then, who deals with Dante—and especially to him, inasmuch as he has the privilege of dealing with that priceless document, the *De Vulgari Eloquio*,[2]—may be left Ciullo, or Cielo, and his successors the Frederician set, from the Emperor himself and Piero delle Vigne downwards. More

[1] See *Studj sulla Letteratura Italiana dei Primi Secoli*. 2d ed. Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1891. Pp. 241-458.

[2] Obtainable in many forms, separately and with Dante's works. The Latin is easy enough, but there is a good English translation by A. G. Ferrers Howell (London, 1890). Those who like facsimiles may find one of the Grenoble MS., with a learned introduction, edited by MM. Maignien and Prompt (Venice, 1892).

especially to him belong the poets of the late thirteenth century, Dante's own immediate predecessors, contemporaries, and in a way masters — Guinicelli, Cavalcanti, Sinibaldi, and Guittone d'Arezzo (to whom the canonical form of the sonnet used at one time to be attributed, and may be again); Brunetto Latini, of fiery memory; Fra Jacopone,[1] great in Latin, eccentric in Italian, and others. It will be not merely sufficient, but in every way desirable, here to content ourselves with an account of the general characteristics of this poetry (contemporary prose, though existent, is of little importance), and to preface this by some remarks on the general influences and contributions of material with which Italian literature started.

Heavy debt to France.

There is no valid reason for doubting that these influences and materials were mainly French. As has been partly noted in a former chapter, the French *chansons de geste* made an early and secure conquest of the Italian ear in the north, partly in translation, partly in the still more unmistakable form of macaronic Italianised French. It has indeed been pointed out that the Sicilian school was to some extent preceded by that of the Trevisan March, the most famous member of which was Sordello. It would appear, however, that this school was even more distinctly and exclusively a branch of Provençal than the Sicilian; and that the

[1] Authorities differ oddly on Jacopone da Todi (*v.* p. 8) in his Italian work. Professor d'Ancona's book, cited above, opens with an excellent essay on him.

special characteristic of the latter did not appear in it. The Carlovingian poems (and to some, though a much less, extent the Arthurian) made a deep impression both on popular and on cultivated Italian taste as a matter of subject; but their form, after its first results in variation and translation, was not perpetuated; and when Italian epic made its appearance some centuries later, it inclined for the most part to burlesque, or at least to the tragi-comic, until the serious genius of Tasso gave it a new, but perhaps a not wholly natural, direction.

In that earliest, really national, and vernacular school, however, which has been the chief subject of discourse, the direction was mainly and almost wholly towards lyric; and the supremacy of the sonnet and the *canzone* is the less surprising because their rivals were for the most part less accomplished examples of the same kind. The *Contrasto*[1] of Ciullo itself is a poem in lyric stanzas of five lines—three of sixteen syllables, rhymed *a*, and two hendecasyllabics, rhymed *b*. The rhymes are fairly exact, though sometimes loose, *o* and *u*, *e* and *i*, being permitted to pair. The poem, a simple discourse or dispute between two lovers, something in the style of some French *pastourelles*, displays however, with some of the exaggeration and stock phrase of Provençal (perhaps we might say of all) love-poetry, little or nothing of that peculiar mystical tone which we have been accustomed to associate with early

Yet form and spirit both original.

[1] The text with comment, stanza by stanza, is to be found in the book cited above.

Italian verse, chiefly represented, as it is to most readers, by the *Vita Nuova*, where the spirit is slightly altered in itself, and speaks in the mouth of a poet greater in his weakest moments than the whole generation from Ciullo to Guittone in their strongest. This spirit, showing itself in the finer and more masculine form in Dante himself, in the more feminine and weaker in Petrarch, not merely gives us sublime or exquisite poetry in the fourteenth century, but in the sixteenth contributes very largely to launch, on fresh careers of achievement, the whole poetry of France and of England. But it is fair to acknowledge its presence in Dante's predecessors, and at the same time to confess that they themselves do not seem to have learned it from any one, or at least from any single master or group of masters. The Provençal poets deify passion, and concentrate themselves wholly upon it; but it is seldom, indeed, that we find the "metaphysical" touch in the Provençals proper. And it is this — this blending of love and religion, of scholasticism and *minnedienst* (to borrow a word wanted in other languages than that in which it exists)—that is attributed by the partisans of the East to Arabian influence, or at least to Arabian contact. Some stress has been laid on the testimony of Ibn Zobeir about the end of the twelfth century, and consequently not long before even the latest date assigned to Ciullo, that Alcamo itself was entirely Mussulman in belief.

On these points it is not possible to decide: the point on which to lay the finger for our present

purpose is that the contribution of Italy at this time was, on the one hand, the further refinement of the Provençal attention to form, and the production of one capital instrument of European poetry — the sonnet; on the other, the conveyance, by means of this instrument and others, of a further, and in one way almost final, variation of the poetic expression of love. It is of the first importance to note the characteristics, in different nations at nearly the same time, of this rise of lyrical love-poetry. We find it in Northern and Southern France, probably at about the same time; in Germany and Italy somewhat later, and almost certainly in a state of pupilship to the French. All, in different ways, display a curious and delightful metrical variety, as if the poet were trying to express the eternal novelty, combined with the eternal oneness, of passion by variations of metrical form. In each language these variations reflect national peculiarities — in Northern French and German irregular bursts with a multiplicity of inarticulate refrain, in Provençal and Italian a statelier and more graceful but somewhat more monotonous arrangement and proportion.

Love-lyric in different European countries.

And the differences of spirit are equally noticeable, though one must, as always, be careful against generalising too rashly as to their identity with supposed national characteristics. The innumerable love-poems of the *trouvères*, pathetic sometimes, and sometimes impassioned, are yet, as a rule, cheerful, not very deep, verging not seldom on pure comedy.

The so-called monotonous enthusiasm of the troubadour, his stock-images, his musical form, sublime to a certain extent the sensual side of love, but confine themselves to that side merely, as a rule, or leave it only to indulge in the purely fantastic.

Of those who borrowed from them, the Germans, as we should expect, lean rather to the Northern type, but vary it with touches of purity, and other touches of religion; the Italians to the Southern, exalting it into a mysticism which can hardly be called devotional, though it at times wears the garb of devotion.[1] Among those collections for which the student of letters pines, not the least desirable would be a *corpus* of the lyric poets of Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. We should then see—after a fashion difficult if not impossible in the sporadic study of texts edited piecemeal, and often overlaid with comment not of the purely literary kind—at once the general similarity and the local or individual exceptions, the filiation of form, the diffusion of spirit. No division of literature, perhaps, would serve better as a kind of chrestomathy for illustrating the positions on which the scheme of this series is based. And though it is overshadowed by the achievements of its own pupils; though it has a double portion of the mediæval defect of "school"-work—of the almost tedious similarity of different men's manner—the Italian poetry, which is practically the Italian literature, of the thirteenth

[1] "Sacro erotismo," "baccanale cristiano," are phrases of Professor d'Ancona's.

century would be not the least interesting part of such a *corpus*.

Position of Spanish.

The Spanish literature[1] with which we have to do is probably inferior in bulk even to that of Italy; it is certainly far less rich in named and more or less known authors, while it is a mere drop as compared with the Dead Sea of Byzantine writing. But by virtue of at least one really great composition, the famous *Poema del Cid*, it ranks higher than either of these groups in sheer literary estimation, while from the point of view of literary history it is perhaps more interesting than the Italian, and certainly far more interesting than the Greek. It does not rank with French as an instance of real literary preponderance and chieftainship; or with German as an example of the sudden if short blossoming of a particular period and dialect into great if not wholly original literary prominence;

[1] Spanish can scarcely be said to have shared, to an extent commensurate with its interest, in the benefit of recent study of the older forms of modern languages. There is, at any rate in English, and I think elsewhere, still nothing better than Ticknor's *History of Spanish Literature* (3 vols., London, 1849, and reprinted since), in the early part of which he had the invaluable assistance of the late Don Pascual de Gayangos. Some scattered papers may be found in *Romania*. Fortunately, almost all the known literary materials for our period are to be found in Sanchez' *Poesias Castellanas Anteriores al Siglo XV.*, the Paris (1842) reprint of which by Ochoa, with a few valuable additions, I have used. The *Poema del Cid* is, except in this old edition, rather discreditably inaccessible — Vollmöller's German edition (Halle, 1879), the only modern or critical one, being, I understand, out of print. It would be a good deed if the Clarendon Press would furnish students with this, the only rival of *Beowulf* and the *Chanson de Roland* in the combination of antiquity and interest.

much less with Icelandic and Provençal, as containing a "smooth and round" expression of certain definite characteristics of literature and life once for all embodied. It has to give way not merely to Provençal, but to Italian itself as an example of early scholarship in literary form. But it makes a most interesting pair to English as an instance of vigorous and genuine national literary development; while, if it is inferior to English, as showing that fatal departmental or provincial separation, that "particularism" which has in many ways been so disastrous to the Peninsula, it once more, by virtue of the *Poema*, far excels our own production of the period in positive achievement, and foretells the masterpieces of the national poetry in a way very different from any that can be said to be shown in Layamon or the *Ancren Riwle*, even in the Arthurian romances and the early lyrics.

Catalan-Provençal.

The earliest literature which, in the wide sense, can be called Spanish divides itself into three heads—Provençal-Catalan; Galician-Portuguese; and Castilian or Spanish proper. Not merely Catalonia itself, but Aragon, Navarre, and even Valencia, were linguistically for centuries mere outlying provinces of the *langue d'oc*. The political circumstances which attended the dying-out of the Provençal school at home, for a time even encouraged the continuance of Provençal literature in Spain: and to a certain extent Spanish and Provençal appear to have been written, if not spoken, bilingually by the same authors. But for the general purpose of this book the fact of the persistence of the "Limousin"

tongue in Catalonia and (strongly dialected) in Valencia having been once noted, not much further notice need be taken of this division.

So also we may, with a brief distinctive notice, pass by the Galician dialects which found their perfected literary form later in Portuguese. No important early literature remains in Galician, and of Portuguese itself there does not seem to be anything certainly dating before the fourteenth century, or anything even probably attributed to an earlier time except a certain number of ballads, as to the real antiquity of which a sane literary criticism has always to reiterate the deepest and most irremovable doubts. The fact of the existence of this dialect, and of its development later into the language of Camoens, is of high interest: the positive documents which at this time it offers for comment are very scanty indeed.

Galician-Portuguese.

With Castilian—that is to say, Spanish proper—the case is very different. It cannot claim any great antiquity: and as is the case with Italian, and to a less degree with French also, the processes by which it came into existence out of Latin are hid from us to a degree surprising, even when we remember the political and social welter in which Europe lay between the fifth and the eleventh centuries. It is, of course, a most natural and constant consideration that the formation of literary languages was delayed in the Romance-speaking countries by the fact that everybody of any education at all had Latin ready to his hands. And the exceptional cir-

Castilian.

cumstances of Spain, which, after hardly settling down under the Visigothic conquest, was whelmed afresh by the Moorish invasion, have not been excessively insisted upon by the authorities who have dealt with the subject. But still it cannot but strike us as peculiar that the document—the famous Charter of Avilés,[1] which plays in the history of Spanish something like the same part which the Eulalia hymn and the Strasburg Oaths play in French—dates only from the middle of the twelfth century, more than three hundred years after the Strasburg interchange, and at a time when French was not merely a regularly constituted language, but already had no inconsiderable literature. It is true that the Avilés document is not quite so jargonish as the Strasburg, but the same mark—the presence of undigested Latin—appears in both.

It is, however, fair to remember that prose is almost invariably later than poetry, and that official prose of all periods has a tendency to the barbarous. If the Avilés charter be genuine, and of its assigned date, it does not follow that at the very same time poetry of a much less uncouth character was not being composed in Spanish. And as a matter of fact we have, independently of the ballads, the great *Poema del Cid*, which has sometimes been supposed to be of antiquity equal to this, and which can hardly be more than some fifty years later.

As to the ballads, what has been said about those in Portuguese must be repeated at somewhat greater

[1] Extracts of this appear in Ticknor, Appendix A., iii. 352, note.

length. There is no doubt at all that these ballads (which are well known even to English readers by the masterly paraphrases of Lockhart) are among the finest of their kind. They rank with, and perhaps above, the best of the Scottish poems of the same class. But we have practically, it would seem, no earlier authority for them than the great *Cancioneros* of the sixteenth century. It is, of course, said that the *Cronica General* (see *post*), which is three centuries earlier, was in part compiled from these ballads. But, in the first place, we do not know that this was the fact, or that the ballads were not compiled from the Chronicles, or from traditions which the Chronicles embodied. And in the second place, if the Chronicles were compiled from ballads, we do not know that these ballads, as pieces of finished literature and apart from their subjects, were anything at all like the ballads that we possess. This last consideration — an uncomfortable one, but one which the critic is bound to urge—at once disposes of, or reduces to a minimum, the value of the much-vaunted testimony of a Latin poem, said to date before the middle of the eleventh century, that "Roderic, called *Mio Cid*," was sung about. No doubt he was; and no doubt, as the expression *Mio Cid* is not a translation from the Arabic, but a quite evidently genuine vernacularity, he was sung of in those terms. But the testimony leaves us as much in doubt as ever about the age of the *existing* Cid ballads. And if this be the case about the Cid ballads, the subject of which did not die till hard

Ballads?

upon the opening of the twelfth century itself, or about those concerning the Infantes of Lara, how much more must it be so with those that deal with such subjects as Bernardo del Carpio and the Charlemagne invasion, three hundred years earlier, when it is tolerably certain that there was nothing at all resembling what we now call Spanish? It seems sometimes to be thought that the antiquity of the subject of a ballad comports in some strange fashion the antiquity of the ballad itself; than which nothing can be much more disputable. Indeed the very metre of the ballads themselves—which, though simple, is by no means of a very primitive character, and represents the "rubbing down" of popular dialect and unscholarly prosody for a long time against the regular structure of Latin — disproves the extreme earliness of the poems in anything like their present form. The comparatively uncouth, though not lawless metres of early Teutonic poetry are in themselves warrants of their antiquity: the regularity, not strait-laced but unmistakable, of the Spanish ballads is at least a strong suggestion that they are not very early

At any rate there is no sort of proof that they *are* early; and in this history it has been made a rule to demand proof, or at least the very strongest probability. If there be any force in the argument at the end of the last paragraph, it tells (unless, indeed, the latest critical hypothesis be adopted, of which more presently) as much in favour of the antiquity of the *Poema del Cid* as it

The Poema del Cid.

tells against that of the ballads. This piece, which has come down to us in a mutilated condition, though it does not seem likely that its present length (3744 lines) has been very greatly affected by the mutilations, has been regarded as dating not earlier than the middle of the twelfth or later than the middle of the thirteenth century—that is to say, in the first case, within a lifetime of the events it professes to deal with; in the second, at scarcely more than two lifetimes from them. The historical personality of Ruy Diaz de Bivar, el Cid Campeador (?1040-1099), does not concern us, though it is perfectly well established in general by the testimony of his enemies, as well as by that of his countrymen, and is indeed almost unique in history as that of a national hero at once of history and of romance. The Roderic who regained what a Roderic had lost may have been—must have been, indeed—presented with many facts and achievements which he never performed, and there may be no small admixture of these in the *Poema* itself; but that does not matter at all to literature. It would not, strictly speaking, matter to literature if he had never existed. But not every one can live up to this severe standard in things literary; and it is undoubtedly a comfort to the natural man to know that the Cid certainly did exist, and that, to all but certainty, his blood runs in the veins of the Queen of England and of the Emperor of Austria, not to mention the King of Spain, to-day.

But in the criticism of his poetical history this is

in strictness irrelevant. It is unlucky for that criticism that Southey and Ticknor — the two best critics, not merely in English but in any language, who have dealt with Spanish literature — were quite unacquainted with the French *chansons de geste;* while of late, discussion of the *Poema*, as of other early Spanish literature, has been chiefly abandoned to philologists. No one familiar with these *chansons* (the greatest and oldest of which, the *Chanson de Roland*, was to all but a certainty in existence when Ruy Diaz was in his cradle, and a hundred years before the *Poema* was written) can fail to see in a moment that this latter is itself a *chanson de geste.* It was written much nearer to the facts than any one of its French analogues, except those of the Crusading cycle, and it therefore had at least the chance of sticking much closer to those facts. Nor is there much doubt that it does. We may give up as many as we please of its details; we may even, if, not pleasing, we choose to obey the historians, give up that famous and delightful episode of the Counts of Carrion, which indeed is not so much an episode as the main subject of the greater part of the poem. But—partly because of its nearness to the subject, partly because of the more intense national belief in the hero, most of all, perhaps, because the countrymen of Cervantes already possessed that faculty of individual, not merely of typical, characterisation which has been, as a rule, denied to the countrymen of Corneille—the poem is far more *alive* than the not less heroic histories of

A Spanish chanson de geste.

Roncesvaux or of Aliscans. Even in the *Nibelungenlied*, to which it has been so often compared, the men (not the women—there the Teutonic genius bears its usual bell) are, with the exception, perhaps, of Hagen, shadowy, compared not merely to Rodrigo himself, but to Bermuez and Muño Gustioz, to Asur Gonzalez and Minaya.

Still the *chanson* stamp is unmistakably on it from the very beginning, where the Cid, like three-fourths of the *chanson* heroes themselves, has experienced royal ingratitude, through the vaunts and the fighting, and the stock phrases (*abaxan las lanzas* following *abrazan los escudos*, and the like), to that second marriage connecting the Cid afresh with royalty, which is almost as common in the *chansons* as the initial ingratitude. It would be altogether astonishing if the *chansons* had not made their way, when French literature was making it everywhere, into the country nearest to France. In face of the *Poema del Cid*, it is quite certain that they had done so, and that here as elsewhere French literature performed its vigorous, and in a way self-sacrificing, function of teaching other nations to do better than their teacher.

In scheme and spirit.

When we pass from comparisons of general scheme and spirit to those of metrical form, the matter presents greater puzzles. As observed above, the earliest French *chansons* known to us are written in a strict syllabic metre, with a regular cæsura, and arranged in distinct though not uniformly long *laisses*, each tipped with an identical assonance.

Difficulties of its prosody.

Further, it so happens that this very assonance is one of the best known characteristics of Spanish poetry, which is the only body of verse except old French to show it in any great volume or variety. The Spanish ballads are uniformly written in trochaic octosyllables (capable of reduction or extension to six, seven, or nine), regularly assonanced in the second and fourth line, but not necessarily showing either rhyme or assonance in the first and third. This measure became so popular that the great dramatists adopted it, and as it thus figures in the two most excellent productions of the literature, ballad and drama, it has become practically identified in the general mind with Spanish poetry, and not so very long ago might have been described by persons, not exactly ignorant, as peculiar to it.

Ballad-metre theory.

But when we turn to the *Poema del Cid* we find nothing like this. It is true that its latest and most learned student, Professor Cornu of Prague,[1] has, I believe, persuaded himself that he has discovered the basis of its metre to be the ballad octosyllables, full or catalectic, arranged as hemistichs of a longer line, and that he has been able to point out some hundreds of tolerably perfect verses of the kind. But this hypothesis necessitates our granting that it was possible for the copyists, or the line of copyists, of the unique MS. in the vast majority of cases to mistake

[1] I have not seen Professor Cornu's paper itself, but only a notice of it by M. G. Paris in *Romania*, xxii. 153, and some additional annotations by the Professor himself at p. 531 of the same volume.

a measure so simple, so universally natural, and, as history shows, so peculiarly grateful to the Spanish ear, and to change it into something quite different.

Irregularity of line.

For there is no question but that at first sight, and not at first sight only, the *Poema del Cid* seems to be the most irregular production of its kind that can claim high rank in the poetry of Europe. It is not merely that it is "rough," as its great northern congener the *Nibelungenlied* is usually said to be, or that its lines vary in length from ten syllables to over twenty, as some lines of Anglo-Saxon verse do. It is that there is nothing like the regular cadence of the one, or (at least as yet discovered) the combined system of accent and alliteration which accounts for the other. Almost the only single feature which is invariable is the break in the middle of the line, which is much more than a mere cæsura, and coincides not merely with the end of a word, but with a distinct stop or at least pause in sense. Beyond this, except by the rather violent hypothesis of copyist misdeeds above referred to,[1] nobody has been able to get further in a generalisation of the metre than that the normal form is an eight and six (better a seven and seven) "fourteener," trochaically cadenced, but admitting contraction and extension with a liberality elsewhere unparalleled.

And the ends of the verses are as troublesome as

[1] It is perhaps fair to Professor Cornu to admit some weight in his argument that where proper names predominate—*i.e.*, where the copyist was least likely to alter—his basis suggests itself most easily.

their bodies. Not only is there no absolute system either of assonance or of rhyme; not only does the consideration that at a certain stage assonance and consonance[1] meet and blend help us little; but it is almost or quite impossible to discern any one system on which the one or the other, or both, can be thought to have been used. Sometimes, indeed frequently, something like the French *laisses* or continuous blocks of end-sound appear: sometimes the eye feels inclined to see quatrains — a form, as we shall see, agreeable to early Spain, and very common in all European nations at this stage of their development. But it is very seldom that either is clearly demonstrable except in parts, while neither maintains itself for long. Generally the pages present the spectacle of an intensely irregular mosaic, or rather conglomerate, of small blocks of assonance or consonance put together on no discoverable system whatever. It is, of course, fair to remember that Anglo-Saxon verse — now, according to the orthodox, to be ranked among the strictest prosodic kinds — was long thought to be as formless as this. But after the thorough ransacking and overhauling which almost all mediæval literature has had during the last century, it is certainly strange that the underlying system in the Spanish case, if it exists, should not have been discovered, or should have been discovered only by such an Alexandrine

[1] Some writers very inconveniently, and by a false transference from "consonant," use "consonance" as if equivalent to "alliteration. It is much better kept for full rhyme, in which vowels and consonants both "sound with" each other.

cutting of the knot as the supposition that the copyist has made "pie" of about seventy per cent at least of the whole.

Still the form, puzzling as it is, is extremely interesting, and very satisfactory to those who can be content with unsystematic enjoyment. The recurrent wave-sound which has been noted in the *chansons* is at least as noticeable, though less regular, here. Let us, for instance, open the poem in the double-columned edition of 1842 at random, and take the passage on the opening, pp. 66, 67, giving the best part of two hundred lines, from 3491 to 3641. The eye is first struck with the constant repetition of catch-endings—"Infantes de Carrion," "los del Campeador"—each of which occurs at a line-end some dozen times in the two pages. The second and still more striking thing is that almost all this long stretch of verse, though not in one single *laisse*, is carried upon an assonance in *o*, either plump (*Infanzon, cort, Carrion*, &c.), which continues with a break or two for at least fifty lines, or with another vowel in double assonance (*taiadores, tendones, varones*). But this sequence is broken incomprehensibly by such end-words as *tomar;* and the length of the lines defies all classification, though one suspects some confusion of arrangement. For instance, it is not clear why

"Colada e Tizon que non lidiasen con ellas los del Campeador"

should be printed as one line, and

"Hybalos ver el Rey Alfonso.
Dixieron los del Campeador,"

as two.

If we then turn to the earlier part, that which comes before the Carrion story, we shall find the irregularity greater still. It is possible, no doubt, by making rules sufficiently elastic, to devise some sort of a system for five consecutive lines which end *folgar*, *comer*, *acordar*, *grandes*, and *pan*; but it will be a system so exceedingly elastic that it seems a superfluity of trouble to make it. On a general survey it may, I think, be said that either in double or single assonance *a* and *o* play a much larger part than the other vowels, whereas in the French analogues there is no predominance of this kind, or at least nothing like so much. And lastly, to conclude[1] these rather desultory remarks on a subject which deserves much more attention than it has yet had, it may be worth observing that by an odd coincidence the *Poema del Cid* concludes with a delusive personal mention very similar to, though even more precise than, that about "Turoldus" in the *Chanson de Roland*. For it ends—

> "Per Abbat le escribio en el mes de maio
> En era de mill e CC....XLV. años,"

there being, perhaps, something dropped between the second C and the X. Peter Abbat, however, has been less fortunate than Turoldus, in that no one, it seems, has asserted his authorship, though he may have been the copyist-malefactor of theory. And it may perhaps

[1] I have not thought it necessary to give an abstract of the contents of the poem, because Southey's *Chronicle of the Cid* is accessible to everybody, and because no wise man will ever attempt to do over again what Southey has once done.

be added that if MCCXLV. is the correct date, this would correspond to 1207 of our chronology, the Spanish mediæval era starting thirty-eight years too early.

Other poems.

The remaining literature before the end of the thirteenth century (immediately after that date there is a good deal, but most of it is imitated from France) may be dismissed more briefly. It is not very bulky, but it is noteworthy that it is collected in a manner by no means usual at the time, under two known names, those of Gonzalo Berceo, priest of St Elianus at Callahorra, and of King Alfonso X. For the Spanish *Alexander* of Juan Lorenzo Segura, though written before 1300, is clearly but one of the numerous family of the French and French-Latin *Alexandreids* and *Romans d'Alixandre.* And certain poems on Apollonius of Tyre, St Mary of Egypt, and the Three Kings, while their date is rather uncertain, are also evidently "school poems" of the same kind.

Apollonius and Mary of Egypt.

The Spanish Apollonius,[1] however, is noteworthy, because it is written in a form which is also used by Berceo, and which has sometimes been thought to be spoken of in the poem itself as *nueva maestria.* This measure is the old fourteener, which struggles to appear in the *Cid*, regularly divided into hephthemimers, and now regularly arranged also in mono-rhymed quatrains. The "Life of St Mary of Egypt,"[2] on the other hand, is in octosyllabic couplets, treated with the same freedom that we find in contemporary German handlings of

[1] Sanchez-Ochoa, *op. cit.*, pp. 525-561. [2] Ibid., pp. 561-576.

that metre, and varying from five syllables to at least eleven. The rhymes are good, with very rare lapses into assonance; one might suspect a pretty close adherence to a probably Provençal original, and perhaps not a very early date. Ticknor, whose Protestantism or whose prudery seems to have been shocked by this "coarse and indecent history"—he might surely have found politer language for a variant of the Magdalene story, which is beautiful in itself and has received especial ornament from art—thought it composed of "meagre monkish verse," and "hardly of importance" except as a monument of language. I should myself venture—with infinitely less competence in the particular language, but some knowledge of other things of the same kind and time—to call it a rather lively and accomplished performance of its class. The third piece[1] of those published, not by Sanchez himself, but as an appendix to the Paris edition, is the *Adoracion de Los Santos Reyes*, a poem shorter than the *Santa Maria Egipciaca*, but very similar in manner as well as in subject. I observe that Ticknor, in a note, seems himself to be of the opinion that these two pieces are not so old as the Apollonius; though his remarks about "the French *fabliaux*" are not to the point. The *fabliaux*, it is true, are in octosyllabic verse; but octosyllabic verse is certainly older than the *fabliaux*, which have nothing to do with the Lives of the Saints. But he could hardly have known this when he wrote.

Berceo, who appears to have written more than thir-

[1] Sanchez-Ochoa, *op. cit.*, pp. 577-579.

teen thousand lines, wrote nothing secular; and though the religious poetry of the Middle Ages is occasionally of the highest order, yet when it is of that rank it is almost invariably Latin, not vernacular, while its vernacular expression, even where not despicable, is apt to be very much of a piece, and to present very few features of literary as distinguished from philological interest. Historians have, however, very properly noted in him the occurrence of a short lyrical fragment in irregular octosyllabics, each rhymed in couplets and interspersed after every line with a refrain. The only certain fact of his life seems to be his ordination as deacon in 1221.

Berceo.

Of King Alfonso the Learned (for he does not seem to have been by any means very wise) much more is of course known, though the saying about the blessedness of having no history is not falsified in his case. But his titular enjoyment of the empire, his difficulties with his sons, his death, practically dethroned, and the rest, do not concern us: nor does even his famous and rather wickedly wrested saying (a favourite with Carlyle) about the creation of the world and the possibility of improvement therein had the Creator taken advice. Even the far more deservedly famous *Siete Partidas*, with that *Fuero Juzgo* in which, though it was issued in his father's time, he is supposed to have had a hand, are merely noteworthy here as early, curious, and, especially in the case of the *Partidas*, excellent specimens of Spanish prose in its earliest form. He could not have executed these or any great part of them himself:

Alfonso el Sabio.

and the great bulk of the other work attributed to him must also have been really that of collaborators or secretaries. The verse part of this is not extensive, consisting of a collection of *Cantigas* or hymns, Provençal in style and (to the puzzlement of historians) Galician rather than Castilian in dialect, and an alchemical medley of verse and prose called the *Tesoro*. These, if they be his, he may have written for himself and by himself. But for his *Astronomical Tables*, a not unimportant *point de repère* in astronomical history, he must, as for the legal works already mentioned and others, have been largely indebted. There seems to be much doubt about a prose *Trésor*, which is or is not a translation of the famous work of Brunetto Latini (dates would here seem awkward). But the *Cronica General de España*, the Spanish Bible, the Universal History, and the *Gran Conquesta de Ultramar* (this last a History of the Crusades, based partly on William of Tyre, partly on the *chanson* cycle of the Crusades, fables and all) must necessarily be his only in the sense that he very likely commissioned, and not improbably assisted in them. The width and variety of the attributions, whether contestable in parts or not, prove quite sufficiently for our purpose this fact, that by his time (he died in 1284) literature of nearly all kinds was being pretty busily cultivated in the Spanish vernaculars, though in this case as in others it might chiefly occupy itself with translations or adaptations of Latin or of French.

This fact in general, and the capital and interesting phenomenon of the *Poema del Cid* in particular, are

the noticeable points in this division of our subject. It will be observed that Spain is at this time content, like Goethe's scholar, *sich üben*. Her one great literary achievement—admirable in some respects, incomparable in itself—is not a novelty in kind: she has no lessons in form to give, which, like some of Italy's, have not been improved upon to this day; she cannot, like Germany, boast a great quantity of work of equal accomplishment and inspiration; least of all has she the astonishing fertility and the unceasing *maestria* of France. But she has practice and promise, she is doing something more than "going to begin," and her one great achievement has (it cannot well be too often repeated) the inestimable and unmistakable quality of being itself and not something else, in spirit if not in scheme, in character if not quite in form. It would be no consolation for the loss of the *Cid* that we have *Beowulf* and *Roland* and the *Nibelungen*—they would not fill its place, they do not speak with its voice. The much-abused and nearly meaningless adjective "Homeric" is here, in so far as it has any meaning, once more appropriate. Of the form of Homer there is little: of the vigour, the freshness, the poetry, there is much.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

It is now time to sum up, as may best be done, the results of this attempt to survey the Literature of Europe during one, if not of its most accomplished, most enlightened, or most generally admired periods, yet assuredly one of the most momentous, the most interesting, the fullest of problem and of promise. Audacious as the attempt itself may seem to some, inadequate as the performance may be pronounced by others, it is needless to spend much more argument in urging its claim to be at least tried on the merits. All varieties of literary history have drawbacks almost inseparable from their schemes. The elaborate monograph, which is somewhat in favour just now, is exposed to the criticism, not quite carping, that it is practically useless without independent study of its subject, and practically superfluous with it. The history of separate literatures, whether in portion or in whole, is always liable to be charged with omissions or with disproportionate treatment within its subject, with want of perspective, with

"blinking," as regards matters without. And so such a survey as this is liable to the charge of being superficial, or of attempting more than it can possibly cover, or of not keeping the due balance between its various provinces and compartments.

It must be for others to say how such a charge, in the present case, is helped by *laches* or incompetence on the part of the surveyor. But enough has, I hope, been said to clear the scheme itself from the objection of uselessness or of impracticability. In one sense, no doubt, far more room than this volume, or a much larger, could provide, may seem to be required for the discussion and arrangement of so great and interesting a matter as the Literature of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries. But to say this, is only saying that no such account in such a space could be exhaustive: and it so happens that an exhaustive account is for the purpose not required—would indeed go pretty far towards the defeat of that purpose. What is wanted is to secure that the reader, whether he pursues his studies in more detail with regard to any of these literatures or not, shall at any rate have in his head a fair general notion of what they were simultaneously or in succession, of the relation in which they stood to each other, of the division of literary labour between them.

If, on the other hand, it be said, "You propose to give, according to your scheme, a volume apiece to the fourteenth and even the fifteenth centuries, the work of which was far less original and interesting than the work of these two! Why do you couple

these?" the answer is not difficult. In the first place, the work of these two centuries—which is mainly though not wholly the work of the hundred years that form their centre period—is curiously inseparable. In only a few cases do we know precise dates, and in many the *circa* is of such a circuitous character that we can hardly tell whether the twelfth or the thirteenth century deserves the credit. In almost all the adoption of any intermediate date of severance would leave an awkward, raw, unreal division. We should leave off while the best of the *chansons de geste* were still being produced, in the very middle of the development of the Arthurian legend, with half the *fabliaux* yet to come and half the sagas unwritten, with the Minnesingers in full voice, with the tale of the Rose half told, with the Fox not yet broken up.

And, in the second place, the singular combination of anonymity and school-character in the most characteristic mediæval literature makes it easier, vast as is its mass and in some cases conspicuous as is its merit, to handle in small space than later work. Only by a wild indulgence in guessing or a tedious minuteness of attention to *Lautlehre* and rhyme-lists is it possible to make a treatment of even a named person like Chrestien de Troyes on the scale of a notice of Dante or even Froissart, and this without reference to the comparative literary importance of the three. The million lines of the *chansons de geste* do not demand discussion in anything like direct proportion to their bulk. One *fabliau*, much more one minnesong or troubadour lyric, has a far greater resemblance

of kind to its fellows than even one modern novel, even one nineteenth-century minor poem, to another. As the men write in schools, so they can be handled in them.

Yet I should hope that it must have been already made apparent how very far the present writer is from undervaluing the period with which he has essayed to deal. He might perhaps be regarded as overvaluing it with more apparent reason — not, I think, with any reason that is more than apparent.

For this was the time, if not of the Birth—the exact times and seasons of literary births no man knoweth—at any rate of the first appearance, full-blown or full-fledged, of Romance. Many praiseworthy folk have made many efforts to show that Romance was after all no such new thing—that there is Romance in the *Odyssey*, Romance in the choruses of Æschylus, Romance East and West, North and South, before the Middle Ages. They are only less unwise than the other good folk who endeavour to tie Romance down to a Teutonic origin, or a Celtic, or in the other sense a Romance one, to Chivalry (which was in truth rather its offspring than its parent), to this, and that, and the other. "All the best things in literature," it has been said, "are returns"; and this is perfectly true, just as it is perfectly true in another sense that all the best things in literature are novelties. In this particular growth, being as it was a product of the unchanging human mind, there were notes, doubtless, of Homer and of Æschylus, of Solomon the son of David and

of Jesus the son of Sirach. But the constituents of the mixture were newly grouped; elements which had in the past been inconspicuous or dormant assumed prominence and activity; and the whole was new.

It was even one of the few, the very few, permutations and combinations of the elements of literature, which are of such excellence, volume, durability, and charm, that they rank above all minor changes and groupings. An *amabilis insania* of the same general kind with those above noted has endeavoured again and again to mark off and define the chief constituents of the fact. The happiest result, if only a partial one, of such attempts has been the opposition between Classical precision and proportion and the Romantic vague; but no one would hold this out as a final or sufficient account of the matter. It may, indeed, be noted that that peculiar blended character which has been observed in the genesis of perhaps the greatest and most characteristic bloom of the whole garden—the Arthurian Legend—is to be found elsewhere also. The Greeks, if they owed part of the intensity, had undoubtedly owed nearly all the gaps and flaws of their production, as well as its extraordinarily short-lived character, to their lack alike of instructors and of fellow-pupils—to the defect in Comparison. Roman Literature, always more or less *in statu pupillari*, had wanted the fellow-pupils, if not the tutor. But the national divisions of mediæval Europe—saved from individual isolation by the great bond of the Church, saved from mutual lack of understanding by the other great bond of the Latin *quasi*-vernacular, shaken

together by wars holy and profane, and while each exhibiting the fresh characteristics of national infancy, none of them case-hardened into national insularity—enjoyed a unique opportunity, an opportunity never likely to be again presented, of producing a literature common in essential characteristic, but richly coloured and fancifully shaded in each division by the genius of race and soil. And this literature was developed in the two centuries which have been the subject of our survey. It is true that not all the nations were equally contributors to the positive literary production of the time. England was apparently paying a heavy penalty for her unique early accomplishments, was making a large sacrifice for the better things to come. Between 1100 and 1300 no single book that can be called great was produced in the English tongue, and hardly any single writer distinctly deserving the same adjective was an Englishman. But how mighty were the compensations! The language itself was undergoing a process of "inarching," of blending, crossing, which left it the richest, both in positive vocabulary and in capacity for increasing that vocabulary at need, of any European speech; the possessor of a double prosody, quantitative and alliterative, which secured it from the slightest chance of poetic poverty or hide-boundness; relieved from the cumbrousness of synthetic accidence to all but the smallest extent, and in case to elaborate a syntax equally suitable for verse and prose, for exposition and narrative, for oratory and for argument. Moreover it was, as I have at least endeavoured to show, probably England which provided the groundwork

and first literary treatment, it was certainly England that provided the subject, of the largest, the most enduring, the most varied single division of mediæval work; while the Isle of Britain furnished at least its quota to the general literature of Europe other than vernacular.

Other countries, though their languages were not conquering their conqueror as English was doing with French, also displayed sufficient individuality in dealing with the models and the materials with which French activity supplied them. The best poetical work of Icelandic, like the best work of its cousin Anglo-Saxon, was indeed over before the period began, and the best prose work was done before it ended, the rapid and never fully explained exhaustion of Norse energy and enterprise preventing the literature which had been produced from having effect on other nations. The children of the *vates* of Grettir and Njal contented themselves, like others, with adapting French romances, and, unlike others, they did not make this adaptation the groundwork of new and original effort. But meanwhile they had made in the Sagas, greater and lesser, such a contribution as no literature has excelled in intensity and character, comparatively small as it is in bulk and comparatively undistinguished in form.

"Unlike others," it has been said; for there can be no doubt that the Charlemagne Cycle from Northern, the troubadour lyric from Southern, France exercised upon Italy the same effect that was exercised in Germany by the romances of Arthur and of Antiquity,

and by the *trouvère* poetry generally. But in these two countries, as also more doubtfully, but still with fair certainty, in Spain, the French models found, as they did also in England, literary capacities and tastes not jaded and outworn, but full of idiosyncrasy, and ready to develop each in its own way. Here however, by that extraordinary law of compensation which seems to be the most general law of the universe, the effects differed as much in quantity and time as in character—a remarkable efflorescence of literature in Germany being at once produced, to relapse shortly into a long sterility, a tardier but more constant growth following in England and Italy, while the effect in Spain was the most partial and obscure of all. The great names of Wolfram von Eschenbach and Walther von der Vogelweide hardly meet with any others in these literatures representing writers who are known abroad as well as at home. Only philologists out of England (and I fear not too many besides philologists in it) read *Alisaunder* and *Richard Cœur de Lion, Arthour and Merlin*, or the *Brut;* the early Italian poets shine but in the reflected light of Dante; and if any one knows the Cid, it is usually from Corneille, or Herder, or Southey, rather than from his own noble *Poem*. But no one who does study these forgotten if not disdained ones, no one who with a love for literature bestows even the most casual attention on them, can fail to see their meaning and their promise, their merit and their charm.

That languages of such power should have remained without literatures is of course inconceivable; that any

of them even needed the instruction they received from France cannot be said positively; but what is certain is that they all received it. In most cases the acknowledgment is direct, express, not capable of being evaded or misconstrued: in all it is incapable of being mistaken by those who have eyes, and who have trained them. To inquire into the cause were rather idle. The central position of France; the early notoriety and vogue of the schools of Paris; the curious position of the language, midway between the extremer Romance and the purely Teutonic tongues, which made it a sort of natural interpreter between them; perhaps most of all that inexplicable but undeniable formal talent of the French for literature, which is as undeniable and as inexplicable as the less formal genius of the English,—all these things, except the central position, only push the problem farther back, and are in need of being explained themselves. But the fact, the solid and certain fact, remains. And so it is that the greater part of this book has necessarily been occupied in expounding, first the different forms which the lessons of France took, and then the different ways in which other countries learnt those lessons and turned them to account.

It is thus difficult to overestimate the importance of that wonderful literature which rises dominant among all these, imparting to all, borrowing from none, or borrowing only subjects, exhibiting finish of structure when all the rest were merely barbarian novices, exploring every literary form from history

to drama, and from epic to song, while others were stammering their exercises, mostly learnt from her. The exact and just proportions of the share due to Southern and Northern France respectively none can now determine, and scholarship oscillates between extremes as usual. What is certain (perhaps it is the only thing that is certain) is that to Provençal belongs the credit of establishing for the first time a modern prosody of such a kind as to turn out verse of perfect form. Whether, if Pallas in her warlike capacity had been kinder to the Provençals, she could or would have inspired them with more varied kinds of literature than the exquisite lyric which as a fact is almost their sole title to fame, we cannot say. As a matter of fact, the kinds other than lyric, and some of the lyrical kinds themselves —the short tale, the epic, the romance, the play, the history, the sermon — all find their early home, if not their actual birthplace, north, not south, of the Limousin line. It was from Normandy and Poitou, from Anjou and the Orleannais, from the Isle of France and Champagne, that in language at least the patterns which were used by all Europe, the specifications, so to speak, which all Europe adapted and filled up, went forth, sometimes not to return.

Yet it is not in the actual literature of France itself, except in those contributions to the Arthurian story which, as it has been pointed out, were importations, not indigenous growths, and in some touches of the *Rose*, that the spirit of Romance is most evident—the spirit which, to those who have

come thoroughly to appreciate it, makes classical grace and finish seem thin and tame, Oriental exuberance tasteless and vulgar, modern scientific precision inexpressibly charmless and jejune.

Different sides of this spirit display themselves, of course, in different productions of the time. There is the spirit of combat, in which the *Chansons de geste* show the way, anticipating in time, if not quite equalling in intensity, the Sagas and the *Nibelungenlied*. There is sometimes faintly mingled with this (as in the *gabz* of the *Voyage à Constantinoble*, and the exploits of Rainoart with the *tinel*) the spirit, half rough, half sly, of jesting, which by-and-by takes shape in the *fabliaux*. There is the immense and restless spirit of curiosity, which explores and refashions, to its own guise and fancy, the relics of the old world, the treasures of the East, the lessons of Scripture itself. Side by side with these there is that singular form of the religious spirit which has been so constantly misunderstood, and which, except in a very few persons, seems so rare nowadays—the faith which is implicit without being imbecile, childlike without being childish, devout with a fearless familiarity, the spirit to which the *Dies Iræ* and the sermons of St Francis were equally natural expressions, and which, if it could sometimes exasperate itself into the practices of the Inquisition, found a far commoner and more genuine expression in the kindly humanities of the *Ancren Riwle*. There is no lack of knowledge and none of inquiry; though in embarking on the enormous ocean of ignorance, it is

inquiry not cabined and cribbed by our limits. In particular, there is an almost unparalleled, a certainly unsurpassed, activity in metaphysical speculation, a fence-play of thought astonishing in its accuracy and style. As Poetry slowly disintegrates and exfoliates itself into Prose, literary gifts for which verse was unsuited develop themselves in the vernaculars; and the chronicle — itself so lately an epic — becomes a history, or at least a memoir; the orator, sacred or profane, quits the school rhetoric and its familiar Latin vehicle for more direct means of persuasion; the jurist gives these vernaculars precision by adopting them.

But with and through and above all these various spirits there is most of all that abstract spirit of poetry, which, though not possessed by the Middle Ages or by Romance alone, seems somehow to be a more inseparable and pervading familiar of Romance and of the Middle Ages than of any other time and any other kind of literature. The sense of mystery, which had rarely troubled the keen intellect of the Greek and the sturdy common-sense of the Roman, which was even a little degraded and impoverished (except in the Jewish prophets and in a few other places) by the busy activity of Oriental imagination, which we ourselves have banished, or think we have banished, to a few "poets' scrolls," was always present to the mediæval mind. In its broadest and coarsest jests, in its most laborious and (as we are pleased to call them) dullest expansions of stories, in its most wire-drawn and most lifeless allegory, in its most

irritating admixture of science and fable, there is always hard by, always ready to break in, the sense of the great and wonderful things of Life, and Love, and Death, of the half-known God and the unknown Hereafter. It is this which gives to Romance, and to mediæval work generally, that "high seriousness," the want of which was so strangely cast at it in reproach by a critic who, I cannot but think, was less intimately acquainted with its literature than with that either of classical or of modern times. Constantly in mediæval poetry, very commonly in mediæval prose, the great things appear greatly. There is in English verse romance perhaps no less felicitous sample of the kind as it stands, none which has received greater vituperation for dulness and commonplace, than *Sir Amadas*. Yet who could much better the two simple lines, when the hero is holding revel after his ghastly meeting with the unburied corse in the roadside chapel?—

> "But the dead corse that lay on bier
> Full mickle his thought was on."

In Homer's Greek or Dante's Italian such a couplet (which, be it observed, is as good in rhythm and vowel contrast as in simple presentation of thought) could hardly lack general admiration. In the English poetry of the Middle Ages it is dismissed as a commonplace.

Yet such things, and far better things, are to be met everywhere in the literature which, during the period we have had under review, took definite form and shape. It produced, indeed, none of the greatest men

of letters—no Chaucer nor Dante, no Froissart even, at best for certainties a Villehardouin and a William of Lorris, a Wolfram and a Walther, with shadowy creatures of speculation like the authors of the great romances. But it produced some of the greatest matter, and some of not the least delightful handlings of matter, in book-history. And it is everywhere distinguished, first, by the adventurous fecundity of its experiments in form and kind, secondly, by the presence of that spirit which has been adumbrated in the last paragraph. In this last, we must own, the pupil countries far outdid their master or mistress. France was stronger relatively in the spirit of poetry during the Middle Ages than she has been since; but she was still weaker than others. She gave them expression, patterns, form: they found passion and spirit, with not seldom positive story-subject as well. When we come upon some *nueva maestria*, as the old Spanish poet called it, some cunning trick of form, some craftsman-like adjustment of style and kind to literary purposes, we shall generally find that it was invented in France. But we know that no Frenchman could have written the *Dies Iræ;* and though we recognise French as at home in the Rose-Garden, and not out of place in the fatal meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere, it sounds but as a foreign language in the towers of Carbonek or of Montsalvatsch.

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